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POEMS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

LONDON:

C. E. MUDIE, 28, UPPER KING STREET,
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TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL is a young American Poet of great promise, whose writings have already obtained considerable reputation in his own country. The present Volume, recently published in New York, is now reprinted in London, in the belief that its thoughtfulness and beauty will commend it to the attention of the English Public; more especially as it appears to furnish a fair specimen of that new development of intellect and feeling, which renders much of the recent literature of America attractive to the minds of many Europeans.

TO

WILLIAM PAGE.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The love between us, which can now look back upon happy years of still enlarging confidence, and forward, with a sure trust in its own prophecy of yet deeper and tenderer sympathies, as long as life shall remain to us, stands in no need, I am well aware, of so poor a voucher as an Epistle Dedicatory. True, it is one of Love's chiefest charms, that it must still take special pains to be superfluous in seeking out ways to declare itself,—but for these it demands no publicity, and wishes no acknowledgment. But the admiration which one soul feels for another loses half its worth, if it let slip any opportunity of making itself heard and felt by that strange Abbot of Unreason which we call the World.

For the humblest man's true admiration is no uncertain oracle of the verdict of Posterity, — the unerring tribunal where Genius is at last allowed the right of trial by its peers, and to which none but sincere and real Greatness can appeal with an unwavering heart. There the false witnesses of to-day will be unable to appear, being fled to some hospitable Texas in the realms of Limbo, beyond the sphere of its jurisdiction and the summons of its apparitors.

I have never seen the works of the Great Masters of your Art, but I have studied their lives, and sure I am that no nobler, gentler, or purer spirit than yours was ever anointed by the Eternal Beauty to bear that part of her divine message which it belongs to the Great Painter to reveal. The sympathy of sister pursuits, of an agreeing artistic faith, and, yet more, of a common hope for the final destiny of man, has not been wanting to us, and now you will forgive the pride I feel in having this advantage over you, namely, of telling that admiration in public which I have never stinted to utter

in private. You will believe, that, as your winning that fadeless laurel, which you deserve, and which will one day surely be yours, can never heighten my judgment of you, so nothing that is not in your own control will ever lower it, and that I shall think as simply of you when the World's opinion has overtaken my own, as now.

As the swiftly diverging channels of Life bear wider and wider apart from us the friends who hoisted sail with us as fellow-mariners, when we cast off for the voyage, and as some, even, who are yet side by side with us, no longer send back to us an answering cheer, we are drawn the more closely to those that remain, and I would fain hope that this joining of our names will always be one of our not least happy memories.

And so, with all best wishes,

I remain always your friend,

J. R. LOWELL.

CAMBRIDGE, December 15, 1843.



CONTENTS.

A LEGEND OF BRITTANY.

	PAGE
PART I.	3
PART II.	31

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

PROMETHEUS	67
SONG	85
ROSALINE	88
ALLEGRA	95
THE FOUNTAIN	98
A DIRGE	101
THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS	106

	PAGE
THE TOKEN	109
AN INCIDENT IN A RAILROAD CAR . . .	111
RHÆCUS	117
SONG	128
IN SADNESS	130
A REQUIEM	134
THE FATHERLAND	137
A PARABLE	139
FORGETFULNESS	142
A REVERIE	144
LOVE	148
TO PERDITA, SINGING	151
ODE	156
THE MOON	165
A GLANCE BEHIND THE CURTAIN . . .	167
THE FORLORN	183
SONG	188
MIDNIGHT	190
A PRAYER	193
FANTASY	195
THE HERITAGE	198
THE ROSE: A BALLAD	202

	PAGE
ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF DR. CHANNING .	206
STANZAS SUNG AT THE ANTI-SLAVERY PICNIC	
IN DEDHAM	211
SILENCE	213
A CHIPPEWA LEGEND	219

SONNETS

I. "THROUGH SUFFERING AND SORROW	231
II. "WHAT WERE I, LOVE," . . .	232
III. IMPATIENCE AND REPROOF . . .	233
IV. REFORMERS	234
V. THE FIERY TRIAL	235
VI. "GREAT TRUTHS ARE PORTIONS OF THE SOUL"	236
VII. "I ASK NOT FOR THOSE THOUGHTS,"	237
VIII. TO —, ON HER BIRTH-DAY . . .	238
IX. "MY LOVE, I HAVE NO FEAR" . .	239
X. "I CANNOT THINK THAT THOU" . .	240
XI. THE HAVEN	241
XII. RESOLVE	242
XIII. "THERE NEVER YET WAS FLOWER"	243

	PAGE
XIV. SUB PONDERE CRESCIT	244
XV. TO THE SPIRIT OF KEATS	245
XVI. THE POET	246
XVII. "BELOVED IN THE NOISY CITY HERE"	247
XVIII. "FULL MANY NOBLE FRIENDS" . .	248
XIX. "HOW OFT DO I LIVE O'ER" . . .	249
XX. "SLOW-OPENING FLOWER"	250
XXI. ON READING WORDSWORTH'S SON- NETS IN DEFENCE OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	251
XXII. THE SAME, CONTINUED	252
XXIII. THE SAME, CONTINUED	253
XXIV. THE SAME, CONTINUED	254
XXV. THE SAME, CONTINUED	255
XXVI. THE SAME, CONCLUDED	256
XXVII. TO —	257
XXVIII. "OUR LOVE IS NOT A FADING, EARTH- LY FLOWER."	258
XXIX. THANKFULNESS	259
XXX. IN ABSENCE	260
XXXI. WENDELL PHILLIPS ,	261
XXXII. THE STREET	262

	PAGE
XXXIII. "I GRIEVE NOT THAT RIPE KNOW- LEDGE	263
XXXIV. "YE WHO BEHOLD THE BODY OF MY THOUGHT,"	264
XXXV. "O, HAPPY CHILDHOOD!"	265
XXXVI. ON MY TWENTY-FOURTH BIRTH- DAY	266
XXXVII. T. J. R. GIDDINGS	267
<hr/>	
L'ENVOI	269

A LEGEND OF BRITTANY.



A LEGEND OF BRITTANY.

PART FIRST.

I.

FAIR as a summer dream was Margaret,—

Such dream as in a poet's soul might start,
Musing of old loves while the moon doth set :

Her hair was not more sunny than her heart,
Though like a natural golden coronet

It circled her dear head with careless art,
Mocking the sunshine, that would fain have lent
To its frank grace a richer ornament.

II.

His loved-one's eyes could poet ever speak,
So kind, so dewy, and so deep were hers,—
But, while he strives, the choicest phrase, too weak,
Their glad reflection in his spirit blurs ;
As one may see a dream dissolve and break
Out of his grasp when he to tell it stirs,
Like that sad Dryad doomed no more to bless
The mortal who revealed her loveliness.

III.

She dwelt for ever in a region bright,
Peopled with living fancies of her own,
Where nought could come but visions of delight,
Far, far aloof from earth's eternal moan :
A summer cloud thrilled through with rosy light,
Floating beneath the blue sky all alone,
Her spirit wandered by itself, and won
A golden edge from some unsetting sun.

IV.

The heart grows richer that its lot is poor,—
God blesses want with larger sympathies,—
Love enters gladliest at the humble door,
And makes the cot a palace with his eyes ;—
So Margaret's heart a softer beauty wore,
And grew in gentleness and patience wise,
For she was but a simple herdsman's child,
A lily chance-sown in the rugged wild.

V.

There was no beauty of the wood or field
But she its fragrant bosom-secret knew,
Nor any but to her would freely yield
Some grace that in her soul took root and grew :
Nature to her glowed ever new-revealed,
All rosy-fresh with innocent morning dew,
And looked into her heart with dim, sweet eyes
That left it full of sylvan memories.

VI.

O, what a face was hers to brighten light,
And give back sunshine with an added glow,
To while each moment with a fresh delight,
And part of memory's best contentment grow !
O, how her voice, as with an inmate's right,
Into the strangest heart would welcome go,
And make it sweet, and ready to become
Of white and gracious thoughts the chosen home !

VII.

None looked upon her but he straightway thought
Of all the greenest depths of country cheer,
And into each one's heart was freshly brought
What was to him the sweetest time of year,
So was her every look and motion fraught
With out-of-door delights and forest lere :
Not the first violet on a woodland lea
Seemed a more visible gift of spring than she.

VIII.

Is love learned only out of poets' books ?

Is there not somewhat in the dropping flood,
And in the nunneries of silent nooks,
And in the murmured longing of the wood,
That could make Margaret dream of lovelorn looks,
And stir a thrilling mystery in her blood
More trembly secret than Aurora's tear
Shed in the bosom of an eglatere ?

IX.

Full many a sweet forewarning hath the mind,
Full many a whispering of vague desire,
Ere comes the nature destined to unbind
Its virgin zone, and all its deeps inspire,—
Low stirrings in the leaves, before the wind
Wakes all the green strings of the forest lyre,
Faint heatings in the calyx, ere the rose
Its warm, voluptuous breast doth all uncloze.

X.

Long in its dim recesses pines the spirit,
Wildered and dark, despairingly alone ;
Though many a shape of beauty wander near it,
And many a wild and half-remembered tone
Tremble from the divine abyss to cheer it,
Yet still it knows that there is only one
Before whom it can kneel and tribute bring,
Yet be far less a vassal than a king.

XI.

To feel a want, yet scarce know what it is,
To seek one nature that is always new,
Whose glance is warmer than another's kiss,
Whom we can bare our inmost beauty to
Nor feel deserted afterwards,—for this
But with our destined co-mate we can do,—
Such longing instinct fills the mighty scope
Of the young soul with one mysterious hope.

XII.

Nought as a maiden's soul is bountiful,
For beauty's law is bounty : it must be
That, when the heart with blessedness is full,
It droops into a sated apathy,
Unless the choice blooms of that bliss it cull
To crown another with, and make it free
Of beauty's harvest, which unfruitful lies,
Wanting the ripening light of loving eyes.

XIII.

So Margaret's heart grew brimming with the lore
Of love's enticing secrets ; and although
She had found none to cast it down before,
Yet oft to Fancy's chapel she would go
To pay her vows, and count the rosary o'er
Of her love's promised graces :—haply so
Miranda's hope had pictured Ferdinand
Long ere the gaunt wave tossed him on the strand.

XIV.

A new-made star that swims the lonely gloom,
Unwedded yet and longing for the sun,
Whose beams, the bride-gifts of the lavish groom,
Blithely to crown the virgin planet run,
Her being was, watching to see the bloom
Of love's fresh sunrise roofing one by one
Its clouds with gold, a triumph-arch to be
For him who came to hold her heart in fee.

XV.

Her sun arose to redden in eclipse,
Alas ! too soon, ere yet 'twas risen wholly,—
But let us not unseal the morrow's lips ;
Swiftly enough thou comest, Melancholy,
And what we win of earth's contentment slips
From our forlorn embraces not too slowly :
Let the bright mist of morning cover now
From our pleased eyes the future's sullen brow.

XVI.

Not far from Margaret's cottage dwelt a knight
Of the proud Templars, a sworn celibate,
Whose heart in secret fed upon the light
And dew of her ripe beauty, through the grate
Of his close vow catching what gleams he might
Of the free heaven, and cursing—all too late—
The cruel faith whose black walls hemmed him in
And turned life's crowning bliss to deadly sin.

XVII.

For he had met her in the wood by chance,
And, having drunk her beauty's wildering spell,
His heart shook like the pennon of a lance
That quivers in a breeze's sudden swell,
And thenceforth, in a close enfolded trance,
From mistily golden deep to deep he fell ;
The earth did waver and fade far away
Beneath the hope in whose warm arms he lay.

XVIII.

A dark, proud man he was, whose half-blown youth
Had shed its blossoms even in opening,
Leaving a few that with more winning ruth [cling,
Trembling around grave manhood's stem might
More sad than cheery, making, in good sooth,
Like the fringed gentian, a late autumn spring :
A twilight nature, braided light and gloom,
A youth half-smiling by an open tomb.

XIX.

Fair as an angel, who yet inly wore
A wrinkled heart forboding his near fall ;
Who saw him alway wished to know him more,
As if he were some fate's defiant thrall
And nursed a dreaded secret at his core ;
Little he loved, but power most of all,
And that he seemed to scorn, as one who knew
By what foul paths men choose to crawl thereto.

XX.

Yet by long sufferance this love had grown
 Into a passion with him, that would make
As great a triumph for a child o'erthrown
 As for a giant, and, self-blinded, take
Ambition's meanest footstool for a throne :
 So day by day he nursed a bitterer ache
At heart, and learned to see no wider realm
Than could be spanned by a grand-master's helm.

XXI.

He could seem noble a rich end to gain,
 And he would talk of nobleness, as 'twere
A gift as cheap and common as the rain ;
 Praise was a thing it seemed he could not bear,
Wrapping himself therefrom in high disdain,
 Yet his most careless deeds were done with care,
And, if they were unheeded or unseen,
A passing shade of gall would cloud his mien.

XXII.

He had been noble, but some great deceit
Had turned his better instinct to a vice :
He strove to think the world was all a cheat,
That power and fame were cheap at any price,
That the sure way of being shortly great
Was even to play life's game with loaded dice,
Since he had tried the honest play and found
That vice and virtue differed but in sound.

XXIII.

But none can wholly put his heart away,
And, though he aimed to act upon a plan
Of steady fraud to keep his soul at bay,
Yet sometimes through his breast an instinct ran,
That roused the memory of a purer day
Ere life to be a bitter toil began :
A self-made minotaur, half man half beast,
He bound himself and longed to be released.

XXIV.

Spurn at the world and it will deem you great,
Scorn it if you would win its high esteem,
Make your own chance, life is too short to wait
Until the side of error kicks the beam,
Set down your value at your own huge rate,
The world will pay it;—such was his weak scheme
To make the most of life, and it serves well
Those who would go no deeper than the shell.

XXV.

Yet Margaret's sight redeemed him for a space
From his own thralldom ; man could never be
A hypocrite when first such maiden grace
Smiled in upon his heart ; the agony
Of wearing all day long a lying face
Fell lightly from him, and, a moment free,
Erect with wakened faith his spirit stood
And scorned the weakness of its demon-mood.

XXVI.

Like a sweet wind-harp to him was her thought,
Which would not let the common air come near,
Till from its dim enchantment it had caught
A musical tenderness that brimmed his ear
With sweetness more ethereal than aught
Save silver-dropping snatches that whilere
Rained down from some sad angel's faithful harp
To cool her fallen lover's anguish sharp.

XXVII.

Deep in the forest was a little dell
High overarched with the leafy sweep
Of a broad oak, through whose gnarled roots there fell
A slender rill that sung itself asleep,
Where its continuous toil had scooped a well
To please the fairy folk ; breathlessly deep
The stillness was, save when the dreaming brook
From its small urn a drizzly murmur shook.

XXVIII.

The wooded hills sloped upward all around
With gradual rise, and made an even rim,
So that it seemed a mighty casque unbound
From some huge Titan's brow to lighten him,
Ages ago, and left upon the ground,
Where the slow soil had mossed it to the brim,
Till after countless centuries it grew
Into this dell, the haunt of noontide dew.

XXIX.

Dim vistas, sprinkled o'er with sun-flecked green,
Wound through the thickest trunks on every side,
And, toward the west, in fancy might be seen
A gothic window in its blazing pride,
When the low sun, two arching elms between,
Lit up the leaves beyond, which, autumn-dyed
With lavish hues, would into splendour start,
Shaming the laboured panes of richest art.

XXX.

Here, leaning once against the old oak's trunk,
Mordred, for such was the young Templar's name,
Saw Margaret come ; unseen, the falcon shrunk
From the meek dove ; sharp thrills of tingling flame
Made him forget that he was vowed a monk,
And all the outworks of his pride o'ercame :
Flooded he seemed with bright delicious pain,
As if a star had burst within his brain.

XXXI.

Such power hath beauty and frank innocence :
A flower burst forth, that sunshine glad to bless,
Even from his love's long leafless stem ; the sense
Of exile from Hope's happy realm grew less,
And thoughts of childish peace, he knew not whence,
Thronged round his heart with many an old caress,
Melting the frost there into pearly dew
That mirrored back his nature's morning-blue.

XXXII.

She turned and saw him, but she felt no dread,
Her purity, like adamantine mail,
Did so encircle her ; and yet her head
She drooped, and made her golden hair her veil,
Through which a glow of rosiest lustre spread,
Then faded, and anon she stood all pale
As snow o'er which a blush of northern-light
Suddenly reddens, and as soon grows white.

XXXIII.

She thought of Tristrem and of Lancilot,
Of all her dreams, and of kind fairies' might,
And how that dell was deemed a haunted spot,
Until there grew a mist before her sight,
And where the present was she half forgot,
Borne backward through the realms of old delight,
Then, starting up awake, she would have gone,
Yet almost wished it might not be alone.

XXXIV.

How they went home together through the wood,
And how all life seemed focused into one
Thought-dazzling spot that set ablaze the blood,
What need to tell? Fit language there is none
For the heart's deepest things. Who ever wooed
As in his boyish hope he would have done?
For, when the soul is fullest, the hushed tongue
Voicelessly trembles like a lute unstrung.

XXXV.

But all things carry the heart's messages
And know it not, nor doth the heart well know,
But nature hath her will; even as the bees,
Blithe go-betweens, fly singing to and fro
With the fruit-quickenning pollen;—hard if these
Found not some all unthought-of way to show
Their secret each to each; and so they did,
And one heart's flower-dust into the other slid.

XXXVI.

Young hearts are free ; the selfish world it is
That turns them miserly and cold as stone,
And makes them clutch their fingers on the bliss,
Which but in giving truly is their own ;—
She had no dreams of barter, asked not his,
But gave hers freely as she would have thrown
A rose to him, or as that rose gives forth
Its generous fragrance, thoughtless of its worth.

XXXVII.

We only prize those hearts that do not prize
Themselves : love by its nature shrinks
From any thought of grovelling merchandise,
And, like a humming bird a-wing, it drinks
From flowerlike souls the honeydew that lies
Wide open to the air, and never thinks
Of its own worth or theirs, or aught beside
But joy and sunlight and life's morning tide.

XXXVIII.

Her summer nature felt a need to bless,
And a like longing to be blest again ;
So, from her skylike spirit, gentleness
Dropt ever like a sunlit fall of rain,
And his beneath drank in the bright caress
As thirstily as would a parched plain,
That long hath watched the showers of sloping gray
For ever, ever, falling far away.

XXXIX.

Now Margaret had gained her secret bower,
Where musing she gazed up into the blue
Calm heaven, which looked as it could never lower,
Now that her happy dreams had come so true :
Life seemed the birth of that last crowded hour,
And, all impearled with sunshine and fresh dew,
It lay before her like a summer walk,
An hour of trembling looks and ravished talk.

XL.

O, might life fade away and gently cease

While the heart vibrates like a golden string,
Ending in music and forgetful peace,

While untried hope is full of sinewy spring
As a new bow, ere yet by slow degrees [wing

Earth's dust hath clotted round the soul's fresh
And made us flutter, sink, and crawl, and die,
Heart-broken by our instinct for the sky!

XLI.

But Earth is Earth, and beautiful is she

Our mother, from whose fertile breast we draw
Half of our nature : it is destiny

That we flee to her for the gloomy maw
Of the unknown ; for we can never see

More than a fragment of the spirit's law,
And clasp her hand most closely when we might
Be weaned at once, and feed on nectarous light.

XLII.

Sorrow, there seemeth more of thee in life

Than we can bear and live, and yet we bear ;
And thy endurance is the desperate knife

Wherewith the cable of our dreams we share,
To steer out boldly through the monstrous strife

Of surging action, and learn how to dare,
And drive right onward through the grasping seas
To Will and Power, which give the soul true ease.

XLIII.

Yet let us dream while we are anchored yet,

If so some portion of the destined ache
That haunts the spirit here we may forget :

Who never dreamed is never well-awake ;
The stars of life one after other set,

And, while we can with faith, 'tis good to make
The world seem what it was when first we turned,
Saw its broad stretch, and for its triumphs burned.

XLIV.

Could Margaret have seen the shaft of woe
Which fate even now was drawing to the head,
Even in the very twanging of the bow,
Whose aim must strike her soaring gladness dead,
She would have shut her eyes upon the blow,
And all her soul upon her lover shed,
Though life went with it,—so the heart is fain
To gamble present bliss for future pain.

XLV.

No matter, woe is short and life is long :
We prate too much of this world's flitting grief,
Thoughtless of the unimaginable throng
Of after-lives that bring the soul relief
And countless chances more : like oak-trees strong,
We shed our frail lives from us, leaf by leaf,
And each new death but brings the spirit more
Broad worlds to win and beauty to adore.

XLVI.

So, Margaret, let thy heart leap up to hear,
Each night, the rustle of the leaves which tells
That the long dreamed-of ecstasy is near,
That made the day seem empty : O, what swells
Of brightly mingled, sudden hope and fear
Hast thou, awaiting him since curfew bells
Have died away, and Hesper in the west
Trembled as doth the joy within thy breast !

XLVII.

How should she dream of ill ? the heart filled quite
With sunshine, like the shepherd's-clock at noon,
Closes its leaves around its warm delight ;
Whate'er in life is harsh or out of tune
Is all shut out, no boding shade of blight
Can pierce the opiate ether of its swoon :
Love is but blind as thoughtful justice is,
But nought can be so wanton-blind as bliss.

XLVIII.

When Mordred came, all soul she seemed to be,
And quite broke through the clay's entangling mesh,
His spirit with her eyes she seemed to see,
And feel its motion in her very flesh ;
And, when he went, his radiant memory
Robed all her fantasies with glory fresh,
As if an angel, quitting her awhile,
Left round her heart the halo of his smile.

XLIX.

Bright passion of young hearts, like the huge burst
Of some grand symphony all unaware
Storming the soul, majestic as the first
Sight of the rousing ocean,—poor and bare,
And barren of all life as spots accursed,
'Thou mak'st all other joys, once deemed most rare !
So Margaret thought when Mordred went away
And made day night, or came and made night day.

L.

All beauty and all life he was to her ;

She questioned not his love, she only knew
That she loved him, and not a pulse could stir

In her whole frame but quivered through and
With this glad thought, and was a minister [through

To do him fealty and service true,
Like golden ripples hasting to the land
To wreck their freight of sunshine on the strand.

LI.

O dewy dawn of love ! O hopes that are

Hung high, like the cliff-swallow's perilous nest,
Most like to fall when fullest, and that jar

With every heavier billow ! O unrest
Than balmiest deeps of quiet sweeter far !

How did ye triumph now in Margaret's breast,
Making it readier to shrink and start
Than the pond-lily's golden quivering heart !

LII.

Here let us pause : O, would the soul might ever
Achieve its immortality in youth,
When nothing yet hath damped its high endeavour
After the starry energy of truth !
Here let us pause, and for a moment sever
This gleam of sunshine from the days unruth
That sometime come to all, for it is good
To lengthen to the last a sunny mood.

LIII.

Hope skims o'er life as we may sometimes see
A butterfly, whose home is in the flowers,
Blown outward far over the moaning sea,
Remembering in vain its odorous bowers ;
It flutters o'er the drear immensity
To sink ere long ; there are not many hours
Ere the heart wonders at the simple hope
That danced so gaily forth with fate to cope.

LIV.

But Faith comes ever after Hope is fled,
 Hope's ghost, with sadder yet with fairer face,
To tell us that she is but seeming dead ;
 That earth is but her body's burial-place,
Whence flowers shall spring, on lowly hearts to shed
 A fragrant prophecy of heaven's grace,
And that we truly could not see her, even,
Till she had flitted to her home in heaven.

A LEGEND OF BRITTANY.

PART SECOND.

I.

As one who, from the sunshine and the green,
Enters the solid darkness of a cave,
Nor knows what precipice or pit unseen
May yawn before him with its sudden grave,
And, with hushed breath, doth often forward lean,
Deeming he hears the plashing of a wave
Dimly below, or feels a damper air
From out some dreary chasm, he knows not where.

II.

So, from the sunshine and the green of love,
We enter on our story's darker part ;
And, though the horror of it well may move
An impulse of repugnance in the heart,
Yet let us think, that, as there's naught above
The all-embracing atmosphere of Art,
So also there is naught that falls below [woe.
Her generous reach, though grimed with guilt and

III.

Her fittest triumph is to show that good
Lurks in the heart of evil evermore,
That love, though scorned, and outcast, and withstood,
Can without end forgive, and yet have store ;
God's love and man's are of the self-same blood,
And He can see that always at the door
Of foulest hearts the angel-nature yet
Knocks to return and cancel all its debt.

IV.

It ever is weak falsehood's destiny

That her thick mask turns crystal to let through
The unsuspecting eyes of honesty ;

But Margaret's heart was too sincere and true
Aught but plain truth and faithfulness to see,

And Mordred's for a time a little grew
To be like hers, won by the mild reproof
Of those kind eyes that kept all doubt aloof.

V.

Full oft they met, as dawn and twilight meet

In northern climes ; she full of growing day,
As he of darkness, which before her feet

Shrank gradual, and faded quite away,
Soon to return ; for power made love sweet

To him, and, when his will had gained full sway,
The taste began to pall ; for never power
Can sate the hungry soul beyond an hour.

VI.

At first he loved her truly ; its far goal

His weary heart had reached and sunk to rest :

She seemed a white-browed angel sent to roll

The heavy stone away which long had prest,

As in a living sepulchre, his soul :

But soon the custom'd nature of his breast

Awoke, and in its iron hand once more

Shook the fierce lash that seared him to the core.

VII.

A healthy love of power thaws the ice

Wherewith sloth fetters oft the gushing will ;

But, when the soul lusts after it, no vice

Is half so deadly ; then it tries its skill

In heaping for its sin some monstrous price

To make it precious ; but, like morning, still

Comes the pale afterthought, and makes it see

The harlot whose poor slave it crouched to be.

VIII.

Such lust in Mordred's soul had dug its lair,
Taking for ransom all good impulses :
Love might have saved him, which makes virtues rare
Even of our vices, as, upon his knees,
Stout Kempion kissed the dragon thrice, and there
Found in its stead the maiden, his heart's peace ;
But he loved Margaret only for the power
It gave him o'er her heart, her virgin dower.

IX.

And, having gained it, still he craved for more ;
Margaret could yield no more save innocence,
And this his thought would often hover o'er,
Poising to swoop, not for the glut of sense,
But to enjoy his mastery to the core,
And probe the depth of his bad influence ;
Such hunger gnawed him and such fierce unrest,
As one who hath a serpent in his breast.

X.

He wrestled with his will, he felt the shame,
The crowning anguish, which the spirit feels
When a pure instinct flies to whence it came,
And in its place a slimy viper steals,
Lulling asleep our guardian sense of blame,
Till on its throne our better nature reels :
He felt the shame, the anguish, and the sin,
Yet oped his heart and let the foul thing in.

XI.

So to his will he won her by degrees,
Working upon her faith with secret wear,
Steadfast and silent as the tireless seas
Gain on the shore ; his thirst he could not bear,
Once having drained love's beaker to the lees,
And, could he quench its flame, he felt no care
If he drank poison : so at last he fell,
Winning the crime he plotted for so well.

XII.

He fell as doth the tempter ever fall,
Even in the gaining of his loathsome end ;
God doth not work as man works, but makes all
The crooked paths of ill to goodness tend ;
Let him judge Margaret ! If to be the thrall
Of love, and faith too generous to defend
Its very life from him she loved, be sin,
What hope of grace may the seducer win ?

XIII.

Grim-hearted world, that look'st with Levite eyes
On those poor fallen by too much faith in man,
She that upon thy freezing threshold lies,
Starved to more sinning by thy savage ban,—
Seeking that refuge because foulest vice
More godlike than thy virtue is, whose span
Shuts out the wretched only,—is more free
From all her crimes than thou wilt ever be !

XIV.

Thou wilt not let her wash thy dainty feet
With such salt things as tears, or with rude hair
Dry them, soft Pharisee, that sit'st at meat
With him who made her such, and speak'st him fair,
Leaving God's wandering lamb the while to bleat
Unheeded, shivering in the pitiless air :
Thou hast made prisoned virtue show more wan
And haggard than a vice to look upon.

XV.

Now many months flew by, and weary grew
To Margaret the sight of happy things ;
Blight fell on all her flowers, instead of dew ;
Shut round her heart were now the joyous wings
Wherewith it wont to soar ; yet not untrue,
Though tempted much, her woman's nature clings
To its first pure belief, and with sad eyes
Looks backward o'er the gate of Paradise.

XVI.

Not wholly desolate, nor quite shut out
From peace, are hearts that love, though hopelessly ;
Though, with rude billows compassed all about.
They toss, lone shipwrecks, on a dreary sea,
Yet love hath glories which the eye of doubt
Withers to look on, for he holds the key
Which opens in the soul that inner cell,
Where in deep peace and heavenly instincts dwell.

XVII.

So Margaret, though Mordred came less oft, [before,
And winter frowned where spring had laughed
In his strange eyes, yet half her sadness doffed,
And in her silent patience loved him more :
Sorrow had made her soft heart yet more soft,
And a new life within her own she bore
Which made her tenderer, as she felt it move
Beneath her breast,—a refuge for her love.

XVIII.

This babe, she thought, would surely bring him back,
And be a bond forever them between ;
Before its eyes the sullen tempest-rack
Would fade, and leave the face of heaven serene ;
And love's return doth more than fill the lack,
Which in his absence withered the heart's green :
And yet a dim foreboding still would flit
Between her and her hope to darken it.

XIX.

She could not figure forth a happy fate,
Even for this life from heaven so newly come ;
The earth must needs be doubly desolate
To him scarce parted from a fairer home :
Such boding heavier on her bosom sate
One night, as, standing in the twilight gloam,
She strained her eyes beyond that dizzy verge
At whose foot faintly breaks the future's surge.

XX.

Poor little spirit ! naught but shame and woe
Nurse the sick heart whose life-blood nurses thine :
Yet not those only ; love hath triumphed so,
As for thy sake makes sorrow more divine :
And yet, though thou be pure, the world is foe
To purity, if born in such a shrine ;
And, having trampled it for struggling thence,
Smiles to itself and calls it Providence.

XXI.

O mockery, that aught unruth and hard
Behind God's name its ugly face should veil !
Sad human nature, that o'er flint and shard
With bleeding feet shrink'st onward wan and pale,
Believing 'tis thy doom to be ill-starred,
Since e'en Religion sanctions the foul tale,
And hating God, because man's creeds but grant
What they his blessings call,—toil, woe, and want !

XXII.

As thus she mused, a shadow seemed to rise
From out her thought, and turn to dreariness
All blissful hopes and sunny memories,
And the quick blood doth curdle up and press
About her heart, which seemed to shut its eyes
And hush itself, as who with shuddering guess
Harks through the gloom and dreads e'en now to fee'
Through his hot breast the icy slide of steel.

XXIII.

But, at that heart-beat, while in dread she was,
In the low wind the honeysuckles gleam,
A dewy thrill flits through the heavy grass,
And, looking forth, she saw, as in a dream,
Within the wood the moonlight's shadowy mass :
Night's starry heart yearning to hers doth seem,
And the deep sky, full-hearted with the moon,
Folds round her all the happiness of June.

XXIV.

What fear could face a heaven and earth like this ?

What silveriest cloud could hang 'neath such a sky ?

A tide of wondrous and unwonted bliss

Rolls back through all her pulses suddenly,

As if some seraph, who had learned to kiss

From the fair daughters of the world gone by,

Had wedded so his fallen light with hers,

Such sweet, strange joy through soul and body stirs.

XXV.

So God leads back in silence those who err

From noble promptings, to his hope again ;

So gentle Nature plays the comforter

To all who seek at man's proud door in vain :

And gladly once again awoke in her

The peace that long in drowsy dark had lain,

And she could feel that hope is never flown,

That God ne'er leaves the soul to grope alone.

XXVI.

Now seek we Mordred : He who did not fear
The crime, yet fears the latent consequence :
If it should reach a brother Templar's ear,
It haply might be made a good pretence
To cheat him of the hope he held most dear ;
For he had spared no thought's or deed's expense,
That by and by might help his wish to clip
Its darling bride,—the high grand-mastership.

XXVII.

Upon his casement, with a knotted brow,
He leaned and mused ; dark shadows came and past
O'er his pale cheek ; some dreadful tempting now
Coils round his heart, which struggles all aghast
And fain would shake it off, yet knows not how,
Then struggles less and less, and yields at last,
And the black serpent, colder and more cold,
Half sleeps, but tightens still its scaly fold.

XXVIII.

The apathy, ere a crime resolved is done,
Is scarce less dreadful than remorse for crime ;
By no allurements can the soul be won
From brooding o'er the weary creep of time.
Mordred stole forth into the happy sun,
Striving to hum a scrap of Breton rhyme,
But the sky struck him speechless, and he tried
In vain to summon up his callous pride.

XXIX.

In the court-yard a fountain leaped away,
A Triton blowing jewels through his shell
Into the sunshine ; Mordred turned away,
Weary because the stone face did not tell
Of weariness, nor could he bear to-day,
Heartsick, to hear the patient sink and swell
Of winds among the leaves, or golden bees
Drowsily humming in the orange trees.

XXX.

All happy sights and sounds now came to him
Like a reproach : he wandered far and wide,
Following the lead of his unquiet whim,
But still there went a something at his side
That made the cool breeze hot, the sunshine dim ;
It would not flee, it could not be defied,
He could not see it, but he felt it there
By the damp chill that crept among his hair.

XXXI.

Day wore at last ; the evening star arose,
And throbbing in the sky grew red and set ;
Then with a guilty, wavering step he goes
To the hid nook where they so oft had met
In happier season, for his heart well knows
That he is sure to find poor Margaret
Watching and waiting there with lovelorn breast
Around her young dream's rudely scattered nest.

XXXII.

Swifter and paler than a sheeted ghost
Out of the heavy darkness glimmereth
To tell some widowed heart that all is lost,
He started close beside her with hard breath
And heavy, as of one long tempest-tost
On the wild main of guilty thoughts, where death
And life strife for the spirit, not the clay,
And death's lean hand hath well nigh clutched its prey.

XXXIII.

"Sweet Margaret!" he said, but in his tone
A something froze her, as if duty tried
To mock the voice of love now long since flown,
And make her feel, with Mordred at her side,
More palpably and bitterly alone:
There stood they, she but doubly beautified
By her meek sadness and the moon's pale glow,
He seeming darker for that light to grow.

XXXIV.

Why follow here that grim old chronicle [blood ?
Which counts the dagger-strokes and drops of
Enough that Margaret by his mad steel fell,
Unmoved by murder from her trusting mood,
Smiling on him as Heaven smiles on Hell,
With a sad love, remembering when he stood
Not fallen yet, the unsealer of her heart,
Of all her holy dreams the holiest part.

XXXV.

His crime complete, scarce knowing what he did,
(So goes the tale,) beneath the altar there
In the high church the stiffening corpse he hid,
And then, to 'scape that suffocating air,
Like a scared ghoul out of the porch he slid ;
But his strained eyes saw bloodspots everywhere,
And ghastly faces thrust themselves between
His soul and hopes of peace with blasted mien.

XXXVI.

His heart went out within him, like a spark
Dropt in the sea ; wherever he made bold
To turn his eyes, he saw, all stiff and stark,
Pale Margaret lying dead ; the lavish gold
Of her loose hair seemed in the cloudy dark
To spread a glory, and a thousand fold
More strangely pale and beautiful she grew :
Her silence stabbed his conscience through and through.

XXXVII.

Or visions of past days,—a mother's eyes
That smiled down on the fair boy at her knee,
Whose happy upturned face to hers replies,—
He saw sometimes ; or Margaret mournfully
Gazed on him full of doubt, as one who tries
To crush belief that does love injury ;
Then she would wring her hands, but soon again
Love's patience glimmered out through cloudy pain.

XXXVIII.

Meanwhile he dared not go and steal away
The silent, dead-cold witness of his sin ;
He had not feared the life, but that dull clay,
Those open eyes that showed the death within,
Would surely stare him mad ; yet all the day
A dreadful impulse, whence his will could win
No refuge, made him linger in the aisle,
Freezing with his wan look each greeting smile.

XXXIX.

Now, on the second day, there was to be
A festival in church : from far and near
Came flocking in the sun-burnt peasantry,
And knights and dames with stately antique cheer,
Blazing with pomp, as if all faërie
Had emptied her quaint halls, or, as it were,
The illuminated marge of some old book,
While we were gazing, life and motion took.

XL.

When all were entered, and the roving eyes
Of all were staid, some upon faces bright,
Some on the priests, some on the traceries
That decked the slumber of a marble knight,
And all the rustlings over that arise
From recognising tokens of delight,
When friendly glances meet,—then silent ease
Spread o'er the multitude by slow degrees.

XLI.

Then swelled the organ : up through choir and nave
The music trembled with an inward thrill
Of bliss at its own grandeur : wave on wave
Its flood of mellow thunder rose, until
The hushed air shivered with the throb it gave,
Then, poising for a moment, it stood still,
And sank and rose again, to burst in spray
That wandered into silence far away.

XLII.

Like to a mighty heart the music seemed,
That yearns with melodies it cannot speak,
Until, in grand despair of what it dreamed,
In the agony of effort it doth break,
Yet triumphs breaking ; on it rushed and streamed
And wantoned in its might, as when a lake,
Long pent among the mountains, bursts its walls
And in one crowding gush leaps forth and falls.

XLIII.

Deeper and deeper shudders shook the air,
As the huge bass kept gathering heavily,
Like thunder when it rouses in its lair,
And with its hoarse growl shakes the low-hung sky :
It grew up like a darkness everywhere,
Filling the vast cathedral ;—suddenly,
From the dense mass a boy's clear treble broke
Like lightning, and the full-toned choir awoke.

XLIV.

Through gorgeous windows shone the sun aslant,
Brimming the church with gold and purple mist,
Meet atmosphere to bosom that rich chant,
Where fifty voices in one strand did twist
Their vari-coloured tones, and left no want
To the delighted soul, which sank abyssed
In the warm music-cloud, while, far below,
The organ heaved its surges to and fro.

XLV.

As if a lark should suddenly drop dead
While the blue air yet trembled with its song,
So snapped at once that music's golden thread,
Struck by a nameless fear that leapt along
From heart to heart, and like a shadow spread
With instantaneous shiver through the throng,
So that some glanced behind, as half aware
A hideous shape of dread were standing there.

XLVI.

As, when a crowd of pale men gather round,
Watching an eddy in the leaden deep,
From which they deem the body of one drowned
Will be cast forth, from face to face doth creep
An eager dread that holds all tongues fast bound,
Until the horror, with a ghastly leap,
Starts up, its dead blue arms stretched aimlessly,
Heaved with the swinging of the careless sea.—

XLVII.

So in the faces of all these there grew,
As by one impulse, a dark, freezing awe,
Which, with a fearful fascination drew
All eyes towards the altar ; damp and raw
The air grew suddenly, and no man knew
Whether perchance his silent neighbour saw
The dreadful thing, which all were sure would rise
To scare the strained lids wider from their eyes.

XLVIII.

The incense trembled as it upward sent
 Its slow, uncertain thread of wandering blue,
As 'twere the only living element
 In all the church, so deep the stillness grew ;
It seemed one might have heard it, as it went,
 Give out an audible rustle, curling through
The midnight silence of that awe-struck air, [there.
More hushed than death, though so much life was

XLIX.

Nothing they saw, but a low voice was heard
 Threading the ominous silence of that fear,
Gentle and terrorless as if a bird,
 Wakened by some volcano's glare, should cheer
The murk air with his song ; yet every word
 In the cathedral's farthest arch seemed near,
As if it spoke to every one apart,
Like the clear voice of conscience in each heart.

L.

“ O Rest, to weary hearts thou art most dear !
O Silence, after life's bewildering din,
Thou art most welcome, whether in the sear
Days of our age thou comest, or we win
Thy poppy-wreath in youth ! then wherefore here
Linger I yet, once free to enter in
At that wished gate which gentle Death doth ope,
Into the boundless realm of strength and hope ?

LI.

“ The realm of Hope it seems, amid the lack
Of hope's entire fulfilment in the clay ;
Beyond our cloud-horizon the soul's track
Seems clear and happy into endless day ;
But, when we enter on it, we look back,
Earth grows the fairer as 'tis far away,
The horizon moves before us as we go,
And where the soul is there is food for woe.

LII.

“The clay falls from us, but the spirit still
Is all unchanged, save in its destined rise
To higher beauty, which upon its will
Depends, as here : not instantly allwise
And good we grow, nor gifted with the skill
Wrong to discern from right with undazed eyes :
Still round us, only wider, the stern ring
Of darkness gathers, never vanishing.

LIII.

“Think not in death my love could ever cease ;
If thou wast false, more need there is for me
Still to be true ; that slumber were not peace,
If ’twere unvisited with dreams of thee :
And thou hadst never heard such words as these,
Save that in heaven I must ever be
Most comfortless and wretched, seeing this
Our unbaptized babe shut out from bliss.

LIV.

“ This little spirit with imploring eyes
Wanders alone the dreary wild of space ;
The shadow of his pain for ever lies
Upon my soul in this new dwelling-place ;
His loneliness makes me in Paradise
More lonely, and, unless I see his face,
Even here for grief could I lie down and die,
Save for my curse of immortality.

LV.

“ World after world he sees around him swim
Crowded with happy souls, that take no heed
Of the sad eyes that from the night's faint rim
Gaze sick with longing on them as they speed
With golden gates, that only shut out him ;
And shapes sometimes from Hell's abysses freed
Flap darkly by him, with enormous sweep
Of wings that roughen wide the pitchy deep.

LVI.

“ I am a mother,—spirits do not shake
This much of earth from them,—and I must pine
Till I can feel his little hands and take
His weary head upon this heart of mine ;
And, might it be, full gladly for his sake
Would I this solitude of bliss resign,
And be shut out of Heaven to dwell with him
For ever in that silence drear and dim.

LVII.

“ I strove to hush my soul, and would not speak
At first, for thy dear sake ; a woman’s love
Is mighty, but a mother’s heart is weak,
And by its weakness overcomes ; I strove
To smother bitter thoughts with patience meek,
But still in the abyss my soul would rove,
Seeking my child, and drove me here to claim
The rite that gives him peace in Christ’s dear name.

LVIII.

“ I sit and weep while blessed spirits sing ;
 I can but long and pine and while they praise,
And, leaning o’er the wall of Heaven, I fling
 My voice to where I deem my infant strays,
Like a robbed bird that cries in vain to bring
 Her nestlings back beneath her wings’ embrace ;
But still he answers not, and I but know
That Heaven and earth are both alike in woe.

LIX.

“ And thou, dear Mordred, after penance done,
 By blessed Mary’s grace may’st meet me here,
For she it was that pitied my sad moan,
 Herself not free from mother’s pangs whilere,
And gave me leave to wander forth alone
 To ask due rites for him I held so dear :
When Holy Church shall grant his soul release,
I shall possess my heart and be at peace.

LX.

“ Yes, ages hence, in joy we yet may meet,
By sorrow thou, and I by patience, tried ;
No steep is hard for love’s white feet to climb,
And faith is but ambition purified,
And hope and memory would still be sweet,
Though every other joy were quite denied ;
So let us look toward our gleam of light,
Although between lie leagues of barren night.”

LXI.

Then the pale priests, with ceremony due,
Baptised the child within its dreadful tomb
Beneath that mother’s heart, whose instinct true
Star-like and battled down the triple gloom
Of sorrow, love, and death : young maidens, too,
Strewed the pale corpse with many a milk-white
And parted the bright hair, and on the breast [bloom,
Crossed the unconscious hands in sign of rest.

LXII.

Some said, that, when the priest had sprinkled o'er
The consecrated drops, they seemed to hear
A sigh, as of some heart from travail sore
Released, and then two voices singing clear,
Misereatur Deus, more and more
Fading far upward, and their ghastly fear
Fell from them with that sound, as bodies fall
From souls upspringing to celestial hall.

LXIII.

And Mordred seemed to hear it and to grow
Lighter at heart, and they who marked him said,
That something of the darkness of his woe
Had from his stony eyes and visage fled,
Which glimmered now with a strange inward glow,
As when the sun, with tempest-rack o'erspread,
Bursts through a sidelong rift, and on his scalp
Goldens afar some huge cloud-built Alp.

LXIV.

But when they sought him he was stark and cold,

The loathing spirit had spurned off the clay

That to such crime had made it overbold :

Upon his breast a little blossom lay

Of amaranth, such as grows not in earth's mould ;

Whence it had come or how could no man say,

But, after years had passed, i only showed

The fresher, and its gold more deeply glowed.



MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.



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PROMETHEUS.

ONE after one the stars have risen and set,
Sparkling upon the hoarfrost on my chain :
The Bear, that prowled all night about the fold
Of the North-star, hath shrunk into his den,
Scared by the blithesome footsteps of the Dawn,
Whose blushing smile floods all the Orient ;
And now bright Lucifer grows less and less,
Into the heaven's blue quiet deep-withdrawn.
Sunless and starles all, the desert sky
Arches above me, empty as this heart.

For ages hath been empty of all joy,
Except to brood upon its silent hope,
As o'er its hope of day the sky doth now.
All night have I heard voices : deeper yet
The deep low breathing of the silence grew,
While all about, muffled in awe, there stood
Shadows, or forms, or both, clear-felt at heart,
But, when I turned to front them, far along
Only a shudder through the midnight ran,
And the dense stillness walled me closer round.
But still I heard them wander up and down
That solitude, and flappings of dusk wings
Did mingle with them, whether of those hags
Let slip upon me once from Hades deep,
Or of yet direr torments, if such be,
I could but guess ; and then toward me came
A shape as of a woman : very pale
It was, and calm : its cold eyes did not move,
And mine moved not, but only stared on them.
Their fixed awe went through my brain like ice ;
A skeleton hand seemed clutching at my heart,
And a sharp chill, as if a dark night fog

Suddenly closed me in, was all I felt :
And then, methought, I heard a freezing sigh,
A long, deep, shivering sigh, as from blue lips
Stiffening in death, close to mine ear. I thought
Some doom was close upon me, and I looked
And saw the red moon through the heavy mist,
Just setting, and it seemed as it were falling,
Or reeling to its fall, so dim and dead
And palsy-struck it looked. Then all sounds merged
Into the rising surges of the pines,
Which, leagues below me, clothing the gaunt loins
Of ancient Caucasus with hairy strength,
Sent up a murmur in the morning wind,
Sad as the wail that from the populous earth
All day and night to high Olympus soars,
Fit incense to thy wicked throne, O Jove !

Thy hated name is tossed once more in scorn
From off my lips, for I will tell thy doom.
And are these tears ? Nay, do not triumph, Jove !
They are wrung from me but by the agonies
Of prophecy, like those sparse drops which fall

From clouds in travail of the lightning, when
The great wave of the storm, high-curved and black
Rolls steadily onward to its thunderous break.
Why art thou made a god of, thou poor type
Of anger, and revenge, and cunning force ?
True Power was never born of brutish Strength,
Nor sweet Truth suckled at the shaggy dugs
Of that old she-wolf. Are thy thunderbolts,
That quell the darkness for a space, so strong
As the prevailing patience of meek Light,
Who, with the invincible tenderness of peace,
Wins it to be a portion of herself ?
Why art thou made a god of, thou, who hast
The never-sleeping terror at thy heart,
That birthright of all tyrants, worse to bear
Than this thy ravening bird on which I smile ?
Thou swear'st to free me, if I will unfold
What kind of doom it is whose omen flits
Across thy heart, as o'er a troop of doves
The fearful shadow of the kite. What need
To know that truth whose knowledge cannot save ?
Evil its errand hath, as well as Good ;

When thine is finished, thou art known no more :
There is a higher purity than thou,
And higher purity is greater strength ;
Thy nature is thy doom, at which thy heart
Trembles behind the thick wall of thy might.
Let man but hope, and thou art straightway chilled
With thought of that drear silence and deep night
Which, like a dream, shall swallow thee and thine :
Let man but will, and thou art god no more,
More capable of ruin than the gold
And ivory that image thee on earth.
He who hurled down the monstrous Titan-brood
Blinded with lightnings, with rough thunders stunned,
Is weaker than a simple human thought.
My slender voice can shake thee, as the breeze,
That seems but apt to stir a maiden's hair,
Sways huge Oceanus from pole to pole :
For I am still Prometheus, and foreknow
In my wise heart the end and doom of all.

Yes, I am still Prometheus, wiser grown
By years of solitude,—that holds apart

The past and future, giving the soul room
To search into itself,—and long commune
With this eternal silence ;—more a god,
In my long-suffering and strength to meet
With equal front the direst shafts of fate,
Than thou in thy faint-hearted despotism,
Girt with thy baby-toys of force and wrath.
Yes, I am that Prometheus who brought down
The light to man, which thou, in selfish fear,
Had'st to thyself usurped,—his by sole right,
For Man hath right to all save Tyranny,—
And which shall free him yet from thy frail throne.
Tyrants are but the spawn of Ignorance,
Begotten by the slaves they trample on,
Who, could they win a glimmer of the light,
And see that Tyranny is always weakness,
Or Fear with its own bosom ill at ease,
Would laugh away in scorn the sand-wove chain
Which their own blindness feigned for adamant.
Wrong ever builds on quicksands, but the Right
To the firm centre lays its moveless base.
The tyrant trembles, if the air but stirs

The innocent ringlets of a child's free hair
And crouches, when the thought of some great spirit,
With world-wide murmur, like a rising gale,
Over men's hearts, as over standing corn,
Rushes, and bends them to its own strong will.
So shall some thought of mine yet circle earth,
And puff away thy crumbling altars, Jove !

And, wouldst thou know of my supreme revenge,
Poor tyrant, even now dethroned in heart,
Realmless in soul, as tyrants ever are,
Listen ! and tell me if this bitter peak,
This never-glutted vulture, and these chains
Shrink not before it ; for it shall befit
A sorrow-taught, unconquered Titan-heart.
Men, when their death is on them, seem to stand
On a precipitous crag that overhangs
The abyss of doom, and in that depth to see,
As in a glass, the features dim and vast
Of things to come, the shadows, as it seems,
Of what have been. Death ever fronts the wise ;
Not fearfully, but with clear promises

Of larger life, on whose broad vans upborne,
Their out-look widens, and they see beyond
The horizon of the Present and the Past,
Even to the very source and end of things.
Such am I now : immortal woe hath made
My heart a seer, and my soul a judge
Between the substance and the shadow of Truth.
The sure supremeness of the Beautiful,
By all the martyrdoms made doubly sure
Of such as I am, this is my revenge,
Which of my wrongs builds a triumphal arch,
Through which I see a sceptre and a throne.
The pipings of glad shepherds on the hills,
Tending the flocks no more to bleed for thee,—
The songs of maidens pressing with white feet
The vintage on thine altars poured no more,—
The murmurous bliss of lovers, underneath
Dim grape-vine bowers, whose rosy bunches press
Not half so closely their warm cheeks, unchecked
By thoughts of thy brute lust,—the hive-like hum
Of peaceful commonwealths, where sunburnt Toil
Reaps for itself the rich earth made its own

By its own labour, lightened with glad hymns
To an omnipotence which thy mad bolts
Would cope with as a spark with the vast sea,—
Even the spirit of free love and peace,
Duty's sure recompense through life and death,—
These are such harvests as all master-spirits
Reap, haply not on earth, but reap no less
Because the sheaves are bound by hands not theirs ;
These are the bloodless daggers wherewithal
They stab fallen tyrants, this their high revenge :
For their best part of life on earth is when,
Long after death, prisoned and pent no more,
Their thoughts, their wild dreams even, have become
Part of the necessary air men breathe ;
When, like the moon, herself behind a cloud,
They shed down light before us on life's sea,
That cheers us to steer onward still in hope.
Earth with her twining memories ivies o'er
Their holy sepulchres ; the chainless sea,
In tempest or wide calm, repeats their thoughts :
The lightning and the thunder, all free things,
Have legends of them for the ears of men.

All other glories are as falling stars,
But universal Nature watching theirs :
Such strength is won by love of human kind.

Not that I feel that hunger after fame,
Which souls of a half-greatness are beset with ;
But that the memory of noble deeds
Cries, shame upon the idle and the vile,
And keeps the heart of Man for ever up
To the heroic level of old time.
To be forgot at first is little pain
To a heart conscious of such high intent
As must be deathless on the lips of men ;
But, having been a name, to sink and be
A something which the world can do without,
Which, having been or not, would never change
The lightest pulse of fate,—this is indeed
A cup of bitterness the worst to taste,
And this thy heart shall empty to the dregs,
Endless despair shall be thy Caucasus
And memory thy vulture ; thou wilt find
Oblivion far lonelier than this peak,—

Behold thy destiny ! Thou think'st it much
That I should brave thee, miserable god !
But I have braved a mightier than thou,
Even the tempting of this soaring heart,
Which might have made me, scarcely less than thou,
A god among my brethren weak and blind,—
Scarce less than thou, a pitiable thing
To be down-trodden into darkness soon.
But now I am above thee, for thou art
The bungling workmanship of fear, the block
That awes the swart Barbarian ; but I
Am what myself have made,—a nature wise
With finding in itself the types of all,—
With watching from the dim verge of the time
What things to be are visible in the gleams
Thrown forward on them from the luminous past,—
Wise with the history of its own frail heart,
With reverence and sorrow, and with love,
Broad as the world, for freedom and for man.

Thou and all strength shall crumble, except Love,
By whom, and for whose glory, ye shall cease :

And, when thou art but a dim moaning heard
From out the pitiless glooms of Chaos, I
Shall be a power and a memory,
A name to fright all tyrants with, a light
Unsetting as the pole-star, a great voice
Heard in the breathless pauses of the fight
By truth and freedom ever waged with wrong,
Clear as a silver trumpet, to awake
Huge echoes that from age to age live on
In kindred spirits, giving them a sense
Of boundless power from boundless suffering wrung :
And many a glazing eye shall smile to see
The memory of my triumph, (for to meet
Wrong with endurance, and to overcome
The present with a heart that looks beyond,
Are triumph), like a prophet eagle, perch
Upon the sacred banner of the Right.
Evil springs up, and flowers, and bears no seed,
And feeds the green earth with its swift decay,
Leaving it richer for the growth of truth ;
But Good, once put in action or in thought,
Like a strong oak, doth from its boughs shed down

The ripe germs of a forest. Thou, weak god,
Shalt fade and be forgotten ! but this soul,
Fresh-living still in the serene abyss,
In every heaving shall partake, that grows
From heart to heart among the sons of men,—
As the ominous hum before the earthquake runs
Far through the Ægean from roused isle to isle,—
Foreboding wreck to palaces and shrines,
And mighty rents in many a cavernous error
That darkens the free light to man :—This heart,
Unscarred by thy grim vulture, as the truth
Grows but more lovely 'neath the beaks and claws
Of Harpies blind that fain would soil it, shall
In all the throbbing exultations share
That wait on freedom's triumphs, and in all
The glorious agonies of martyr-spirits,—
Sharp lightning-throes to split the jagged clouds
That veil the future, showing them the end,—
Pain's thorny crown for constancy and truth,
Girding the temples like a wreath of stars.
This is a thought, that, like the fabled laurel,
Makes my faith thunder-proof ; and thy dread bolts

Fall on me like the silent flakes of snow
On the hoar brows of aged Caucasus :
But, O thought far more blissful, they can rend
This cloud of flesh, and make my soul a star !

Unleash thy crouching thunders now, O Jove !
Free this high heart, which, a poor captive long,
Doth knock to be let forth, this heart which still,
In its invincible manhood, overtops
Thy puny godship, as this mountain doth
The pines that moss its root. O, even now,
While from my peak of suffering I look down,
Beholding with a far-spread gush of hope
The sunrise of that Beauty, in whose face,
Shone all around with love, no man shall look
But straightway like a god he is uplift
Unto the throne long empty for his sake,
And clearly oft foreshadowed in wide dreams
By his free inward nature, which nor thou,
Nor any anarchy after thee, can bind
From working its great doom,—now, now set free
This essence, not to die, but to become

Part of that awful Presence which doth haunt
The palaces of tyrants, to hunt off,
With its grim eyes and fearful whisperings
And hideous sense of utter loneliness,
All hope of safety, all desire of peace,
All but the loathed forefeeling of blank death,—
Part of that spirit which doth ever brood
In patient calm on the unpilfered nest
Of man's deep heart, till mighty thoughts grow fledged
To sail with darkening shadow o'er the world,
Filling with dread such souls as dare not trust
In the unfailing energy of Good,
Until they swoop, and their pale quarry make
Of some o'erbloated wrong,—that spirit which
Scatters great hopes in the seed-field of man,
Like acorns among grain, to grow and be
A roof for freedom in all coming time !

But no, this cannot be ; for ages yet,
In solitude unbroken, shall I hear
The angry Caspian to the Euxine shout,
And Euxine answer with a muffled roar,

On either side storming the giant walls
Of Caucasus with leagues of climbing foam,
(Less, from my height, than flakes of downy snow,)
That draw back baffled but to hurl again,
Snatched up in wrath and horrible turmoil,
Mountain on mountain, as the Titans erst,
My brethren, scaling the high seat of Jove,
Heaved Pelion upon Ossa's shoulders broad,
In vain emprise. The moon will come and go
With her monotonous vicissitude ;
Once beautiful, when I was free to walk
Among my fellows, and to interchange
The influence benign of loving eyes,
But now by aged use grown wearisome ;—
False thought ! most false ! for how could I endure
These crawling centuries of lonely woe
Unshamed by weak complaining, but for thee,
Loneliest, save me, of all created things,
Mild-eyed Astarte, my best comforter,
With thy pale smile of sad benignity ?

Year after year will pass away and seem

To me, in mine eternal agony,
But as the shadows of dumb summer-clouds,
Which I have watched so often darkening o'er
The vast Sarmatian plain, league-wide at first,
But, with still swiftness, lessening on and on
Till cloud and shadow meet and mingle where
The gray horizon fades into the sky,
Far, far to northward. Yes, for ages yet
Must I lie here upon my altar huge,
A sacrifice for man. Sorrow will be,
As it hath been, his portion ; endless doom,
While the immortal with the mortal linked
Dreams of its wings and pines for what it dreams,
With upward yearn unceasing. Better so :
For wisdom is meek sorrow's patient child,
And empire over self, and all the deep
Strong charities that make men seem like gods ;
And love, that makes them be gods, from her breasts
Sucks in the milk that makes mankind one blood.
Good never comes unmixed, or so it seems,
Having two faces, as some images
Are carved, of foolish gods ; one face is ill ;

But one heart lies beneath, and that is good,
As are all hearts, when we explore their depths.
Therefore, great heart, bear up! thou art but type
Of what all lofty spirits endure, that fain
Would win men back to strength and peace through
Each hath his lonely peak, and on each heart [love:
Envy, or scorn, or hatred, tears lifelong
With vulture beak ; yet the high soul is left ;
And faith, which is but hope grown wise ; and love
And patience, which at last shall overcome.

SONG.

Violet ! sweet violet !
Thine eyes are full of tears ;
Are they wet
Even yet
With the thought of other years ?
Or with gladness are they full,
For the night so beautiful,
And longing for those far-off spheres ?

Loved-one of my youth thou wast,
Of my merry youth,
And I see,
Tearfully,

All the fair and sunny past,
All its openness and truth,
Ever fresh and green in thee
As the moss is in the sea.

Thy little heart, that hath with love
Grown coloured like the sky above,
On which thou lookest ever,—
Can it know
All the woe
Of hope for what returneth never,
All the sorrow and the longing
To these hearts of ours belonging ?

Out on it ! no foolish pining
For the sky
Dims thine eye,
Or for the stars so calmly shining ;
Like thee let this soul of mine
Take hue from that wherefore I long,
Self-stayed and high, serene and strong,
Not satisfied with hoping—but divine.

Violet ! dear violet !

Thy blue eyes are only wet

With joy and love of him who sent thee,

And for the fulfilling sense

Of that glad obedience

Which made thee all that Nature meant thee !

ROSALINE.

THOU look'd'st on me all yesternight,
Thine eyes were blue, thy hair was bright
As when we murmured our troth-plight
Beneath the thick stars, Rosaline !
Thy hair was braided on thy head,
As on the day we two were wed,
Mine eyes scarce knew if thou wert dead,—
But my shrunk heart knew, Rosaline !

The death-watch ticked behind the wall,
The blackness rustled like a pall,
The moaning wind did rise and fall
Among the bleak pines, Rosaline !

My heart beat thickly in mine ears :
The lids may shut out fleshly fears,
But still the spirit sees and hears,—
Its eyes are lidless, Rosaline !

A wildness rushing suddenly,
A knowing some ill shape is nigh,
A wish for death, a fear to die,—
Is not this vengeance, Rosaline ?
A loneliness that is not lone,
A love quite withered up and gone,
A strong soul trampled from its throne,—
What wouldst thou further, Rosaline ?

'Tis drear such moonless nights as these,
Strange sounds are out upon the breeze,
And the leaves shiver in the trees,
And then thou comest, Rosaline !
I seem to hear the mourners go,
With long black garments trailing slow,
And plumes anodding to and fro,
As once I heard them, Rosaline !

Thy shroud is all of snowy white,
And, in the middle of the night,
Thou standest moveless and upright,
Gazing upon me, Rosaline !
There is no sorrow in thine eyes,
But evermore that meek surprise,—
O, God ! thy gentle spirit tries
To deem me guiltless, Rosaline !

Above thy grave the robin sings,
And swarms of bright and happy things
Flit all about with sunlit wings,—
But I am cheerless, Rosaline !
The violets on the hillock toss,
The gravestone is o'ergrown with moss ;
For nature feels not any loss,—
But I am cheerless, Rosaline !

Ah ! why wast thou so lowly bred ?
Why was my pride galled on to wed
Her who brought lands and gold, instead
Of thy heart's treasure, Rosaline ?

Why did I fear to let thee stay
To look on me and pass away
Forgivingly, as in its May
A broken flower, Rosaline ?

I thought not, when my dagger strook,
Of thy blue eyes : I could not brook
The past all pleading in one look
Of utter sorrow, Rosaline !
I did not know when thou wast dead ;
A blackbird whistling overhead
Thrilled through my brain ; I would have fled,
But dared not leave thee, Rosaline !

A low, low moan, a light twig stirred
By the upspringing of a bird,
A drip of blood, were all I heard,—
Then deathly stillness, Rosaline !
The sun rolled down, and very soon,
Like a great fire, the awful moon
Rose, stained with blood, and then a swoon
Crept chilly o'er me, Rosaline

The stars came out ; and, one by one,
Each angel from his silver throne
Looked down and saw what I had done :
I dared not hide me, Rosaline !
I crouched ; I feared thy corpse would cry
Against me to God's quiet sky,
I thought I saw the blue lips try
To utter something, Rosaline !

I waited with a maddened grin
To hear that voice all icy thin
Slide forth and tell my deadly sin
To hell and heaven, Rosaline !
But no voice came, and then it seemed,
That, if the very corpse had screamed,
The sound like sunshine glad had streamed
Through the dark stillness, Rosaline !

Dreams of old quiet glimmered by,
And faces loved in infancy
Came and looked on me mournfully,
Till my heart melted, Rosaline !

I saw my mother's dying bed,
I heard her bless me, and I shed
Cool tears,—but, lo ! the ghastly dead
Stared me to madness, Rosaline !

And then, amid the silent night,
I screamed with horrible delight,
And in my brain an awful light
Did seem to crackle, Rosaline !
It is my curse ! sweet memories fall
From me like snow,—and only all
Of that one night, like cold worms, crawl
My doomed heart over, Rosaline !

Thine eyes are shut : they never more
Will leap thy gentle words before
To tell the secret o'er and o'er
Thou couldst not smother, Rosaline !
Thine eyes are shut ; they will not shin
With happy tears, or, through the vine
That hid thy casement, beam on mine,
Sunful with gladness, Rosaline

Thy voice I never more shall hear,
Which in old times did seem so dear,
That, ere it trembled in mine ear,
My quick heart heard it, Rosaline !
Would I might die ! I were as well,
Ay, better, at my home in hell,
To set for aye a burning spell
'Twixt me and memory, Rosaline !

Why wilt thou haunt me with thine eyes,
Wherein such blessed memories,
Such pitying forgiveness lies,
Than hate more bitter, Rosaline ?
Woe 's me ! I know that love so high
As thine, true soul, could never die,
And with mean clay in churchyard lie,—
Would it might be so, Rosaline !

ALLEGRA.

I WOULD more natures were like thine,
That never casts a glance before,—
Thou Hebe, who thy heart's bright wine
So lavishly to all dost pour,
That we who drink forget to pine,
And can but dream of bliss in store.

Thou canst not see a shade in life ;
With sunward instinct thou dost rise,
And, leaving clouds below at strife,
Gazest undazzled at the skies,
With all their blazing splendours rife,
A songful lark with eagle's eyes.

Thou wast some foundling whom the Hours
Nursed, laughing, with the milk of Mirth ;
Some influence more gay than ours
Hath ruled thy nature from its birth,
As if thy natal-stars were flowers
That shook their seeds round thee on earth.

And thou, to lull thine infant rest,
Wast cradled like an Indian child ;
All pleasant winds from south and west
With lullabies thine ears beguiled,
Rocking thee in thine oriole's nest,
Till Nature looked at thee and smiled.

Thine every fancy seems to borrow
A sunlight from thy childish years,
Making a golden cloud of sorrow
A hope-lit rainbow out of tears,—
Thy heart is certain of to-morrow,
Though 'yond to-day it never peers.

I would more natures were like thine,
So innocently wild and free,
Whose sad thoughts, even, leap and shine,
Like sunny wavelets in the sea,
Making us mindless of the brine
In gazing on the brilliancy.

THE FOUNTAIN.



INTO the sunshine,
Full of the light,
Leaping and flashing
From morn till night !

Into the moonlight,
Whiter than snow,
Waving so flower-like
When the winds blow !

Into the starlight
Rushing in spray,

Happy at midnight,
Happy by day !

Ever in motion,
Blithesome and cheery,
Still climbing heavenward,
Never weary ;—

Glad of all weathers,
Still seeming best,
Upward or downward,
Motion thy rest ;—

Full of a nature
Nothing can tame,
Changed every moment,
Ever the same ;—

Ceaseless aspiring,
Ceaseless content,
Darkness or sunshine
Thy element ;—

Glorious fountain !

Let my heart be

Fresh, changeful, constant,

Upward, like thee !

A DIRGE.



POET ! lonely is thy bed,
And the turf is overhead,—
 Cold earth is thy cover ;
But thy heart hath found release,
And it slumbers full of peace
'Neath the rustle of green trees,
And the warm hum of the bees
 Mid the drowsy clover ;
Through thy chamber still as death
A smooth gurgle wandereth,
As the blue stream murmureth
 To the blue sky over.

Where thy stainless clay doth lie
Clear and open is the sky,
And the white clouds wander by,
Dreams of summer, silently

Darkening the river ;
Thou hearest the clear water run,
And the ripples, every one
Scattering the golden sun,
Through thy silence quiver.

Thou wast full of love and truth,
Of forgivingness and ruth,—
Thy great heart with hope and youth

Tided to o'erflowing ;
Thou didst dwell in mysteries,
And there lingered on thine eyes
Shadows of serener skies,
Awfully wild memories

That were like foreknowing ;
Thou didst remember well and long
Some fragments of thine angel-song,
And strive, through want, and woe, and wrong,
To win the world unto it ;

Thy curse it was to see and hear
Beyond to-day's scant hemisphere,
Beyond all mists of doubt and fear,
Into a life more true and clear,—
And dearly thou didst rue it.

“Thou sow'st no gold, and shalt not reap !”
Muttered Earth, turning in her sleep ;
“Come home to the eternal deep !”
Murmured a voice, and a wide sweep
Of wings through thy soul's hush did creep,
As of thy doom o'erflying ;
It seemed as thy strong heart would leap
Out of thy breast, and thou didst weep,
But not with fear of dying ;
Men could not fathom thy deep fears,
They could not understand thy tears,
The hoarded agony of years
Of bitter self-denying ;
So once, when, high above the spheres,
Thy spirit sought its starry peers,
It came not back to face the jeers
Of brothers who denied it ;

Star-crowned, thou dost possess the deeps
Of God, and thy white body sleeps
Where the lone pine for ever keeps
Patient watch beside it.

Poet ! underneath the turf,
Soft thou sleepest, free from morrow ;
Thou hast struggled through the surf
Of wild thoughts, and want, and sorrow ;
Now, beneath the moaning pine,
Full of rest thy body lieth,
While, far up in pure sunshine,
Underneath a sky divine,
Her loosed wings thy spirit trieth !
Oft she strove to spread them here,
But they were too white and clear
For our dingy atmosphere.

Thy body findeth ample room
In its still and grassy tomb
By the silent river ;
But thy spirit found the earth
Narrow for the mighty birth

Which it dreamed of ever ;
Thou wast guilty of a rhyme
Learned in a benigner clime,
And of that more grievous crime,—
An ideal too sublime
For the low-hung sky of Time.

The calm spot where thy body lies
Gladdens thy soul in Paradise,

It is so still and holy ;
Thy body sleeps serenely there,
And well for it thy soul may care,
It was so beautiful and rare,

Lily-white so wholly :
From so pure and sweet a frame
Thy spirit parted as it came,

Gentle as a maiden ;
Now it hath its full of rest,
Sods are lighter on its breast
Than the great prophetic guest
Wherewith it was laden.

THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS.

THERE came a youth upon the earth,
Some thousand years ago,
Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
Whether to plough, or reap, or sow.

He made a lyre, and drew therefrom
Music so strange and rich,
That all men loved to hear,—and some
Muttered of fagots for a witch.

But King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine,
Decreed his singing not too bad
To hear between the cups of wine :

And so, well-pleased with being soothed
 Into a sweet half-sleep,
Three times his kingly beard he smoothed,
And made him viceroy o'er his sheep.

His words were simple words enough
 And yet he used them so,
That what in other mouths was rough
In his seemed musical and low.

Men called him but a shiftless youth,
 In whom no good they saw ;
And yet, unwittingly, in truth,
They made his careless words their law.

They knew not how he learned at all,
 For, long hour after hour,
He sat and watched the dead leaves fall,
Or mused upon a common flower.

It seemed the loveliness of things
 Did teach him all their use,

For, in mere weeds, and stones, and springs,
He found a healing power profuse.

Men granted that his speech was wise,
But, when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace and woman's eyes,
They laughed, and called him good-for naught.

Yet after he was dead and gone,
And e'en his memory dim,
Earth seemed more sweet to live upon,
More full of love, because of him.

And day by day more holy grew
Each spot where he had trod,
Till after-poets only knew
Their first-born brother as a god.

THE TOKEN.

It is a mere wild rosebud,
Quite sallow now, and dry,
Yet there's something wondrous in it,—
Some gleams of days gone by,—
Dear sights and sounds that are to me
The finger-posts of memory,
And stir my heart's blood far below
Its short-lived waves of joy and woe.

Lips must fade and roses wither,
All sweet times be o'er,—
They only smile, and, murmuring "Thither!"
Stay with us no more :

And yet ofttimes a look or smile,
Forgotten in a kiss's while,
Years after from the dark will start,
And flash across the trembling heart.

Thou hast given me many roses,
But never one, like this,
O'erfloods both sense and spirit
With such a deep, wild bliss ;—
We must have instincts that glean up
Sparse drops of this life in the cup,
Whose taste shall give us all that we
Can prove of immortality.

Earth's stablest things are shadows,
And, in this life to come,
Haply some chance-saved trifle
May tell of this old home :
As now sometimes we seem to find,
In a dark crevice of the mind,
Some relic, which, long pondered o'er,
Hints faintly at a life before.

AN INCIDENT IN A RAILROAD CAR.

He spoke of Burns : men rude and rough
Pressed round to hear the praise of one
Whose heart was made of manly, simple stuff,
As homespun as their own.

And, when he read, they forward leaned,
Drinking, with thirsty hearts and ears,
His brook-like songs whom glory never weaned
From humble smiles and tears.

Slowly there grew a tender awe,
Sun-like, o'er faces brown and hard,

As if in him who read they felt and saw
Some presence of the bard.

It has a sight for sin and wrong
And slavish tyranny to see,
A sight to make our faith more pure and strong
In high humanity.

I thought, these men will carry hence
Promptings their former life above,
And something of a finer reverence
For beauty, truth, and love.

God scatters love on every side,
Freely among his children all,
And always hearts are lying open wide,
Wherein some grains may fall.

There is no wind but soweth seeds
Of a more true and open life,
Which burst, unlooked-for, into high-souled deeds,
With wayside beauty rife.

We find within these souls of ours
Some wild germs of a higher birth,
Which in the poet's tropic heart bear flowers
Whose fragrance fills the earth.

Within the hearts of all men lie
These promises of wider bliss,
Which blossom into hopes that cannot die,
In sunny hours like this.

All that hath been majestic
In life or death, since time began,
Is native in the simple heart of all,
The angel heart of man.

And thus, among the untaught poor,
Great deeds and feelings find a home,
That cast in shadow all the golden lore
Of classic Greece and Rome.

O, mighty brother-soul of man,
Where'er thou art, in low or high,

Thy skyey arches with exulting span
O'er-roof infinity !

All thoughts that mould the age begin
Deep down within the primitive soul,
And from the many slowly upward win
To one who grasps the whole :

In his broad breast the feeling deep
That struggled on the many's tongue,
Swells to a tide of thought, whose surges leap
O'er the weak thrones of wrong.

All thought begins in feeling,—wide
In the great mass its base is hid,
And, narrowing up to thought, stands glorified,
A moveless pyramid.

Nor is he far astray who deems
That every hope, which rises and grows broad
In the world's heart, by ordered impulse streams
From the great heart of God.

God wills, man hopes : in common souls
Hope is but vague and undefined,
Till from the poet's tongue the message rolls
A blessing to his kind.

Never did Poesy appear
So full of heaven to me, as when
I saw how it would pierce through pride and fear
To the lives of coarsest men.

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century ;—

But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men ;

So write some earnest verse or line,
Which, seeking not the praise of art,

Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

He who doth this, in verse or prose,
May be forgotten in his day,
But surely shall be crowned at last with those
Who live and speak for aye.

1842.

RHŒCUS.

God sends his teachers unto every age,
To every clime, and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of Truth
Into the selfish rule of one sole race :
'Therefore each form of worship that hath swayed
'The life of man, and given it to grasp
'The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
Enfolds some germs of goodness and of right ;
Else never had the eager soul, which loathes
The slothful down of pampered ignorance,
Found in it even a moment's fitful rest.

There is an instinct in the human heart
Which makes that all the fables it hath coined,
To justify the reign of its belief
And strengthen it by beauty's right divine,
Veil in their inner cells a mystic gift,
Which, like the hazel twig, in faithful hands,
Points surely to the hidden springs of truth.
For, as in nature naught is made in vain,
But all things have within their hull of use
A wisdom and a meaning which may speak
Of spiritual secrets to the ear
Of spirit ; so, in whatsoe'er the heart
Hath fashioned for a solace to itself,
To make its inspirations suit its creed,
And from the niggard hands of falsehood wring
Its needful food of truth, there ever is
A sympathy with Nature, which reveals,
Not less than her own works, pure gleams of light
And earnest parables of inward lore.
Hear now this fairy legend of old Greece,
As full of freedom, youth, and beauty still

As the immortal freshness of that grace
Carved for all ages on some Attic frieze.

A youth named Rhæcus, wandering in the wood,
Saw an old oak just trembling to its fall,
And, feeling pity of so fair a tree,
He propped its gray trunk with admiring care,
And with a thoughtless footstep loitered on.
But, as he turned, he heard a voice behind
That murmured "Rhæcus!" 'Twas as if the leaves,
Stirred by a passing breath, had murmured it,
And, while he paused bewildered, yet again
It murmured "Rhæcus!" softer than a breeze.
He started and beheld with dizzy eyes
What seemed the substance of a happy dream
Stand there before him, spreading a warm glow
Within the green glooms of the shadowy oak.
It seemed a woman's shape, yet all too fair
To be a woman, and with eyes too meek
For any that were wont to mate with gods.
All naked like a goddess stood she there,
And like a goddess all too beautiful

To feel the guilt-born earthliness of shame.

“ Rhœcus, I am the Dryad of this tree,”

Thus she began, dropping her low-toned words

Serene, and full, and clear, as drops of dew,

“ And with it I am doomed to live and die ;

The rain and sunshine are my caterers,

Nor have I other bliss than simple life ;

Now ask me what thou wilt, that I can give,

And with a thankful joy it shall be thine.”

Then Rhœcus, with a flutter at the heart,

Yet, by the prompting of such beauty, bold,

Answered : “ What is there that can satisfy

The endless craving of the soul but love ?

Give me thy love, or but the hope of that

Which must be evermore my spirit’s goal.”

After a little pause she said again,

But with a glimpse of sadness in her tone,

“ I give it, Rhœcus, though a perilous gift ;

An hour before the sunset meet me here.”

And straightway there was nothing he could see

But the green glooms beneath the shadowy oak,

And not a sound came to his straining ears
But the low trickling rustle of the leaves,
And far away upon an emerald slope
The falter of an idle shepherd's pipe.

Now, in those days of simpleness and faith,
Men did not think that happy things were dreams
Because they overstepped the narrow bourne
Of likelihood, but reverently deemed
Nothing too wondrous or too beautiful
To be the guerdon of a daring heart.
So Rhæcus made no doubt that he was blest,
And all along unto the city's gate
Earth seemed to spring beneath him as he walked,
The clear, broad sky looked bluer than its wont,
And he could scarce believe he had not wings,
Such sunshine seemed to glitter through his veins
Instead of blood, so light he felt and strange.

Young Rhæcus had a faithful heart enough,
But one that in the present dwelt too much,
And, taking with blithe welcome whatsoe'er

Chance gave of joy, was wholly bound in that,
Like the contented peasant of a vale,
Deemed it the world, and never looked beyond.
So, haply meeting in the afternoon
Some comrades who were playing at the dice,
He joined them and forgot all else beside.

The dice were rattling at the merriest,
And Rhœcus, who had met but sorry luck,
Just laughed in triumph at a happy throw,
When through the room there hummed a yellow bee
That buzzed about his ear with down-dropped legs
As if to light. And Rhœcus laughed and said,
Feeling how red and flushed he was with loss,
“By Venus ! does he take me for a rose ?”
And brushed him off with rough, impatient hand.
But still the bee came back, and thrice again
Rhœcus did beat him off with growing wrath.
Then through the window flew the wounded bee,
And Rhœcus, tracking him with angry eyes,
Saw a sharp mountain-peak of Thessaly
Against the red disc of the setting sun,—

And instantly the blood sank from his heart,
As if its very walls had caved away.
Without a word he turned, and, rushing forth,
Ran madly through the city and the gate,
And o'er the plain, which now the wood's long shade,
By the low sun thrown forward broad and dim,
Darkened well-nigh unto the city's wall,

Quite spent and out of breath he reached the tree,
And, listening fearfully, he heard once more
The low voice murmur "Rhæcus!" close at hand:
Whereat he looked around him, but could see
Nought but the deepening glooms beneath the oak.
Then sighed the voice, "O, Rhæcus! never more
Shalt thou behold me or by day or night,
Me, who would fain have blest thee with a love
More ripe and bounteous than ever yet
Filled up with nectar any mortal heart:
But thou didst scorn my humble messenger,
And sent'st him back to me with bruised wings.
We spirits only show to gentle eyes,
We ever ask an undivided love,

And he who scorns the least of Nature's works
Is thenceforth exiled and shut out from all.
Farewell ! for thou canst never see me more."

'Then Rhœcus beat his breast, and groaned aloud,
And cried, " Be pitiful ! forgive me yet
'This once, and I shall never need it more !"
" Alas !" the voice returned, " 'tis thou art blind,
Not I unmerciful ; I can forgive,
But have no skill to heal thy spirit's eyes ;
Only the soul hath power o'er itself."
With that again there murmured " Never more !"
And Rhœcus after heard no other sound,
Except the rattling of the oak's crisp leaves,
Like the long surf upon a distant shore,
Raking the sea-worn pebbles up and down.
The night had gathered round him : o'er the plain
The city sparkled with its thousand lights,
And sounds of revel fell upon his ear
Harshly and like a curse ; above, the sky,
With all its bright sublimity of stars,
Deepened, and on his forehead smote the breeze :

Beauty was all around him and delight,
But from that eve he was alone on earth.

So in our youth we shape out noble ends,
And worship Beauty with such earnest faith
As but the young, unwasted heart can know,
And, haply wandering into some good deed,
Win for our souls a moment's sight of Truth.
Then the sly world runs up to us and smiles,
And takes us by the hand and cries "Well met!
Come play with me at dice; one lucky throw,
And all my power and glory shall be thine,
Stake but thy heart upon the other side!"
So we turn gayly in, and by degrees
Lose all our nature's broad inheritance,—
The happiness content with homely things,—
The wise simplicity of honest faith,—
The unsuspecting gentleness of heart,—
The open-handed grace of Charity,—
The love of Beauty, and the deathless hope
To be her chosen almoner on earth,—
And we rise up at last with wrinkled brows,

Most deeply-learned in the hollow game,
At which we now have nothing left to stake,
Albeit too wise to stake it, if we had.

But Truth will never let the heart alone
That once hath sought her, sending o'er and o'er
Her sweet and unreproachful messengers
To lure us back again and give us all,
Which we, all fresh and burning in the game,
Wherein we lose and lose with seeming gain,
Brush off impatiently with sharp rebuff,
Feeling our better instincts now no more
But as reproaches lacking other aim
Than to abridge our little snatch of bliss.
And, when we rouse at length, and feel within
The stirring of our ancient love again,
Our eyes are blinded that we cannot see
The fair benignity of unveiled Truth
That plighted us its holy troth erewhile.
Our sun is setting : we are just too late :
And so, instead of lightening by our lives
The general burden of our drooping kind,—

Instead of being named in aftertime
With grateful reverence, as men who talked
With spirits, and the dreaded secret wrung
From out the loath lips of the sphinx of life,—
Instead of being, as all true men may,
Part of the memory of all great deeds,
The inspiration of all time to come,—
We linger to our graves with empty hearts,
And add our little handful to the soil,
As valueless and frail as fallen leaves.

SONG.

THERE is a light in thy blue eyes,
Like an eternal morn,
A glorious freshness of the skies,
That dulls not, nor is worn,
Though all earth's flitting shadows try
Its sunny immortality.

From thee I learn all gentleness,
From thee I learn all truth ;
And, from thy brimming heart's excess,
My spirit garners youth,
Gleaning, in harvest-hours like this,
Ripe winter-stores of golden bliss.

O, happy soul ! O, happy heart !

O, happy dreams of mine !

That thus can linger all apart

Within so charmed a shrine,

While the old weary earth turns round

With all its strife of empty sound !

1841.

IN SADNESS.



THERE is not in this life of ours
One bliss unmixed with fears ;
The hope that wakes our deepest powers
A face of sadness wears,
And the dew that showers our dearest flowers
Is the bitter dew of tears.

Fame waiteth long, and lingereth
Through weary nights and morns,
And evermore the shadow Death
With mocking finger scorns
That underneath the laurel-wreath
Should be a wreath of thorns.

'The laurel-leaves are cool and green,
But the thorns are hot and sharp ;
Lean Hunger grins and stares between
The poet and his harp,
Though of Love's sunny sheen his woof have been,
Grim want thrusts in the warp.

And if, beyond this darksome clime,
Some fair star Hope may see,
That keeps unjarred the blissful chime
Of its golden infancy,—
Where the harvest-time of faith sublime
Not always is to be ;—

Yet would the true soul rather choose
A home where sorrow is,
Than in a sated peace to lose
Its life's supremest bliss,—
The rainbow hues that bend profuse
O'er cloudy spheres like this,—

The want, the sorrow, and the pain,
That are Love's right to cure,—
The sunshine bursting after rain,—
The gladness insecure,
That makes us fain strong hearts to gain,
To do and to endure.

High natures must be thunder-scarred
With many a searing wrong ;
From mother Sorrow's breasts the bard
Sucks gifts of deepest song ;
Nor all unmarred with struggles hard
Wax the soul's sinews strong.

Dear Patience, too, is born of woe,
Patience, that opes the gate
Where through the soul of man must go
Up to each nobler state,
Whose voice's flow so meek and low
Smooths the bent brows of Fate.

Though Fame be slow, yet Death is swift,

And, o'er the spirit's eyes,

Life after life doth change and shift

With larger destinies :

As on we drift, some wider rift

Shows us serener skies.

And, though naught falleth to us here

But gains the world counts loss

Though all we hope of wisdom clear,

When climbed to, seems but dross,

Yet all, though ne'er Christ's faith they wear,

At least may share his cross.

A REQUIEM.



Av, pale and silent maiden,
Cold as thou liest there,
Thine was the sunniest nature
That ever drew the air,
The wildest and most wayward,
And yet so gently kind,
Thou seemedst but to body
A breath of summer wind.

Into the eternal shadow
That girds our life around,
Into the infinite silence
Wherewith Death's shore is bound,

Thou hast gone forth, beloved !
And I were mean to weep,
That thou hast left Life's shallows
And dost possess the Deep.

Thou liest low and silent,
Thy heart is cold and still,
Thine eyes are shut for ever,
And Death hath had his will ;
He loved and would have taken,
I loved and would have kept,
We strove,—and he was stronger,
And I have never wept.

Let him possess thy body,
Thy soul is still with me,
More sunny and more gladsome
Than it was wont to be :
Thy body was a fetter
That bound me to the flesh,
Thank God that it is broken,
And now I live afresh !

Now I can see thee clearly ;
The dusky cloud of clay,
That hid thy starry spirit,
Is rent and blown away :
To earth I give thy body,
Thy spirit to the sky,
I saw its bright wings growing,
And knew that thou must fly.

Now I can love thee truly,
For nothing comes between
The senses and the spirit,
The seen and the unseen ;
Lifts the eternal shadow,
The silence bursts apart,
And the soul's boundless future
Is present in my heart.

THE FATHERLAND.

WHERE is the true man's fatherland ?

Is it where he by chance is born ?

Doth not the yearning spirit scorn
In such scant borders to be spanned ?

O, yes ! his fatherland must be

As the blue heaven wide and free !

Is it alone where freedom is,

Where God is God and man is man ?

Doth he not claim a broader span
For the soul's love of home than this ?

O, yes ! his fatherland must be

As the blue heaven wide and free !

Where'er a human heart doth wear
Joy's myrtle-wreath or sorrow's gyves,
Where'er a human spirit strives
After a life more true and fair,
There is the true man's birth-place grand,
His is a world-wide fatherland !

Where'er a single slave doth pine,
Where'er one man may help another,—
Thank God for such a birthright, brother,—
That spot of earth is thine and mine !
'There is the true man's birth-place grand,
His is a world-wide fatherland !

A PARABLE.

WORN and footsore was the Prophet,
When he gained the holy hill ;
“ God has left the earth,” he murmured,
“ Here his presence lingers still.

“ God of all the olden prophets,
Wilt thou speak with men no more ?
Have I not as truly served thee.
As thy chosen ones of yore ?

“ Hear me, guider of my fathers,
Lo ! a humble heart is mine ;
By thy mercy I beseech thee,
Grant thy servant but a sign !”

Bowing then his head, he listened
For an answer to his prayer ;
No loud burst of thunder followed,
Not a murmur stirred the air : —

But the tuft of moss before him
Opened, while he waited yet,
And, from out the rock's hard bosom,
Sprang a tender violet.

“ God ! I thank thee,” said the Prophet ;
“ Hard of heart and blind was I,
Looking to the holy mountain
For the gift of prophecy.

“ Still thou speakest with thy children
Freely as in eld sublime ;
Humbleness, and love, and patience
Still give empire over time.

“ Had I trusted in my nature,
And had faith in lowly things,

Thou thyself wouldst then have sought me,
And set free my spirit's wings.

“ But I looked for signs and wonders,
That o'er men should give me sway,
Thirsting to be more than mortal,
I was even less than clay.

“ Ere I entered on my journey,
As I girt my loins to start,
Ran to me my little daughter,
The beloved of my heart ;—

“ In her hand she held a flower,
Like to this as like may be,
Which, beside my very threshold,
She had plucked and brought to me.”

FORGETFULNESS.



THERE IS a haven of sure rest
From the loud world's bewildering stress :
As a bird dreaming on her nest,
As dew hid in a rose's breast,
As Hesper in the glowing West ;
So the heart sleeps
In thy calm deeps,
Serene Forgetfulness !

No sorrow in that place may be,
The noise of life grows less and less :
As moss far down within the sea,
As, in white lily caves, a bee,
As life in a hazy reverie ;
So the heart's wave
In thy dim cave,
Hushes, Forgetfulness !

Duty and care fade far away,
What toil may be we cannot guess :
As a ship anchored in a bay,
As a cloud at summer-noon astray,
As water-blooms in a breezeless day ;
So, 'neath thine eyes,
The full heart lies,
And dreams, Forgetfulness !

A REVERIE.

IN the twilight deep and silent
Comes thy spirit unto mine,
When the starlight and the moonlight
Over cliff and woodland shine,
And the quiver of the river
Seems a thrill of joy benign.

Then I rise and go in fancy
To the headland by the sea,
When the evening-star throbs setting
Through the dusky cedar-tree ;
And, from under, low-voiced thunder
From the surf swells fitfully.

Then within my soul I feel thee,
Like a dream of bygone years ;
Visions of my childhood murmur
Their old madness in mine ears,
Till the pleasance of thy presence
Crowds my heart with blissful tears.

All the wondrous dreams of boyhood,
All youth's fiery thirst of praise,
All the surer hopes of manhood
Blossoming in sadder days,
Joys that bound me, griefs that crowned me
With a better wreath than bays,—

All the longings after freedom,
The vague love of human-kind,
Wandering far and near at random,
Like a dead leaf on the wind,
Rousing only in the lonely
Twilight of an aimless mind,—

All of these, O, best beloved !

Happiest present dreams and past,
In thy love find safe fulfilment,
Ripened into truth at last ;
Faith and beauty, hope and duty,
To one centre gather fast.

How my spirit, like an ocean,
At the breath of thine awakes,
Leaps its shores in mad exulting,
And in foamy music breaks,
Then, down-sinking, lieth shrinking
From the tumult that it makes !

Blazing Hesperus hath sunken
Low adown the pale-blue west,
And with blazing splendour crowneth
The horizon's piny crest ;
Thoughtful quiet stills the riot
Of wild longing in my breast.

Home I loiter through the moonlight,
Underneath the quivering trees,
Which, as if a spirit stirred them,
Sway and bend, till, by degrees,
The faint surge's murmur merges
In the rustle of the breeze.

1842.

LOVE.

TRUE Love is but a humble, low-born thing,
And hath its food served up in earthen ware ;
It is a thing to walk with, hand in hand,
Through the every-dayness of this work-day world,
Baring its tender feet to every roughness,
Yet letting not one heart-beat go astray
From Beauty's law of plainness and content ;
A simple, fire-side thing, whose quiet smile
Can warm earth's poorest hovel to a home ;
Which, when our autumn cometh, as it must,
And life in the chill wind shivers bare and leafless,
Shall still be blest with Indian-summer youth
In bleak November, and, with thankful heart,

Smile on its ample stores of garnered fruit,
As full of sunshine to our aged eyes
As when it nursed the blossoms of our spring.
Such is true Love, which steals into the heart
With feet as silent as the lightsome dawn
That kisses smooth the rough brows of the dark,
And hath its will through blissful gentleness,—
Not like a rocket, which, with savage glare,
Whirrs suddenly up, then bursts, and leaves the night
Painfully quivering on the dazed eyes ;
A love that gives and takes, that seeth faults,
Not with flaw-seeking eyes like needle-points,
But, loving kindly, ever looks them down
With the o'ercoming faith of meek forgiveness ;
A love that shall be new and fresh each hour,
As is the golden mystery of sunset,
Or the sweet coming of the evening-star,
Alike, and yet most unlike, every day,
And seeming ever best and fairest *now* ;
A love that doth not kneel for what it seeks,
But faces Truth and Beauty as their peer,
Showing its worthiness of noble thoughts

By a clear sense of inward nobleness ;
A love that in its object findeth not
All grace and beauty, and enough to sate
Its thirst of blessing, but, in all of good
Found there, it sees but Heaven-granted types
Of good and beauty in the soul of man,
And traces, in the simplest heart that beats.
A family likeness to its chosen one,
That claims of it the rights of brotherhood.
For Love is blind but with the fleshy eye,
That so its inner sight may be more clear ;
And outward shows of beauty only so
Are needful at the first, as is a hand
To guide and to uphold an infant's steps :
Great spirits need them not ; their earnest look
Pierces the body's mask of thin disguise,
And beauty ever is to them revealed,
Behind the unshapeliest, meanest lump of clay,
With arms outstretched and eager face ablaze,
Yearning to be but understood and loved.

TO PERDITA, SINGING,

THY voice is like a fountain,
Leaping up in clear moonshine ;
Silver, silver, ever mounting,
Ever sinking,
Without thinking,
To that brimful heart of thine,

Every sad and happy feeling,
Thou hast had in bygone years,
Through thy lips come stealing, stealing,
Clear and low ;
All thy smiles and all thy tears
In thy voice awaken,

And sweetness, wove of joy and woe,
From their teaching it hath taken :
Feeling and music move together,
Like a swan and shadow, ever
Heaving on a sky-blue river
In a day of cloudless weather.

It hath caught a touch of sadness,
Yet it is not sad ;
It hath tones of clearest gladness,
Yet it is not glad ;
A dim, sweet, twilight voice it is,
Where to-day's accustomed blue
Is over-grayed with memories,
With starry feelings quivered through.

Thy voice is like a fountain
Leaping up in sunshine bright,
And I never weary counting
Its clear droppings, lone and single,
Or when in one full gush they mingle,
Shooting in melodious light.

Thine is music such as yields
Feelings of old brooks and fields,
And, around this pent-up room,
Sheds a woodland, free perfume ;

O, thus for ever sing to me !

O, thus for ever !

The green, bright grass of childhood bring to me,

Flowing like an emerald river,

And the bright-blue skies above !

O, sing them back, as fresh as ever,

Into the bosom of my love,—

The sunshine and the merriment,

The unsought, evergreen content,

Of that never cold time,

The joy, that, like a clear breeze, went

Through and through the old time !

Peace sits within thine eyes,

With white hands crossed in joyful rest,

While, through thy lips and face, arise

The melodies from out thy breast ;

She sits and sings,

With folded wings
And white arms crost,
“ Weep not for past things,
They are not lost :
The beauty which the summer time
O'er thine opening spirit shed,
The forest oracles sublime
That filled thy soul with joyous dread,
The scent of every smallest flower
That made thy heart sweet for an hour,—
Yea, every holy influence,
Flowing to thee, thou knewest not whence,
In thine eyes to-day is seen,
Fresh as it hath ever been ;
Promptings of Nature, beckonings sweet,
Whatever led thy childish feet,
Still will linger unawares
The guiders of thy silver hairs ;
Every look and every word
Which thou givest forth to-day,
Tell of the singing of the bird
Whose music stilled thy boyish play.”

Thy voice is like a fountain,
Twinkling up in sharp starlight,
When the moon behind the mountain
Dims the low East with faintest white,
 Ever darkling,
 Ever sparkling,
We know not if 'tis dark or bright ;
But, when the great moon hath rolled round,
 And, sudden-slow, its solemn power
Grows from behind its black, clear-edged bound,
 No spot of dark the fountain keepeth,
 But, swift as opening eyelids, leapeth
 Into a waving silver flower.

ODE.



I.

In the old days of awe and keen-eyed wonder,
The Poet's song with blood-warm truth was rife ;
He saw the mysteries which circle under
The outward shell and skin of daily life.
Nothing to him were fleeting time and fashion,
His soul was led by the eternal law ;
There was in him no hope of fame, no passion,
But, with calm, godlike eyes, he only saw.
He did not sigh o'er heroes dead and buried,
Chief mourner at the Golden Age's hearse,
Nor deem that souls whom Charon grim had ferried
Alone were fitting themes of epic verse :

He could believe the promise of to-morrow,
And feel the wondrous meaning of to-day ;
He had a deeper faith in holy sorrow
Than the world's seeming loss could take away.
To know the heart of all things was his duty,
All things did sing to him to make him wise,
And, with a sorrowful and conquering beauty,
The soul of all looked grandly from his eyes,
He gazed on all within him and without him,
He watched the flowing of Time's steady tide,
And shapes of glory floated all about him
And whispered to him, and he prophesied.
Than all men he more fearless was and freer,
And all his brethren cried with one accord,—
“ Behold the holy man ! Behold the Seer !
Him who hath spoken with the unseen Lord ! ”
He to his heart with large embrace had taken
The universal sorrow of mankind,
And, from that root, a shelter never shaken,
The tree of wisdom grew with sturdy rind.
He could interpret well the wondrous voices
Which to the calm and silent spirit come ;

He knew that the One Soul no more rejoices
In the star's anthem than the insect's hum.
He in his heart was ever meek and humble,
And yet with kingly pomp his numbers ran,
As he foresaw how all things false should crumble
Before the free, uplifted soul of man :
And, when he was made full to overflowing
With all the loveliness of heaven and earth,
Out rushed his song, like molten iron glowing,
To show God sitting by the humblest hearth.
With calmest courage he was ever ready
To teach that action was the truth of thought,
And, with strong arm and purpose firm and steady,
The anchor of the drifting world he wrought.
So did he make the meanest man partaker
Of all his brother-gods unto him gave ;
All souls did reverence him and name him Maker,
And when he died heaped temples on his grave.
And still his deathless words of light are swimming
Serene throughout the great, deep infinite
Of human soul, unwaning and undimming,
To cheer and guide the mariner at night.

II.

But now the Poet is an empty rhymers

Who lies with idle elbow on the grass,
And fits his singing, like a cunning timer,

To all men's prides and fancies as they pass.
Not his the song, which, in its metre holy,

Chimes with the music of the eternal stars,
Humbling the tyrant, lifting up the lowly,

And sending sun through the soul's prison-bars.
Maker no more,—O, no ! unmaker rather,

For he unmakes who doth not all put forth
The power given by our loving Father

To show the body's dross, the spirit's worth.
Awake ! great spirit of the ages olden !

Shiver the mists that hide thy starry lyre,
And let man's soul be yet again beholden

To thee for wings to soar to her desire.
O, prophesy no more to-morrow's splendour,

Be no more shame-faced to speak out for Truth,
Lay on her altar all the gushings tender,

The hope, the fire, the loving faith of youth !

O, prophesy no more the Maker's coming,

Say not his onward footsteps thou canst hear
In the dim void, like to the awful humming

Of the great wings of some new-lighted sphere !

O, prophesy no more, but be the Poet !

This longing was but granted unto thee
That, when all beauty thou couldst feel and know it,
That beauty in its highest thou couldst be.

O, thou who moanest tost with sea-like longings,

Who dimly hearest voices call on thee,
Whose soul is overfilled with mighty throngings
Of love, and fear, and glorious agony,

Thou of the toil-strung hands and iron sinews
And soul by Mother Earth with freedom fed,
In whom the hero-spirit yet continues,

The old free nature is not chained or dead,
Arouse ! let thy soul break in music-thunder,

Let loose the ocean that is in thee pent,
Pour forth thy hope, thy fear, thy love, thy wonder,
And tell the age what all its signs have meant.

Where'er thy wildered crowd of brethren jostles,
Where'er there lingers but a shade of wrong,

There still is need of martyrs and apostles,
There still are texts for never-dying song :
From age to age man's still aspiring spirit
Finds wider scope and sees with clearer eyes,
And thou in larger measure dost inherit
What made thy great forerunners free and wise.
Sit thou enthroned where the Poet's mountain
Above the thunder lifts its silent peak,
And roll thy songs down like a gathering fountain,
That all may drink and find the rest they seek.
Sing! there shall silence grow in earth and heaven,
A silence of deep awe and wondering ;
For, listening gladly, bend the angels, even,
To hear a mortal like an angel sing.

III.

Among the toil-worn poor my soul is seeking
For one to bring the Maker's name to light,
To be the voice of that almighty speaking
Which every age demands to do it right.
Proprieties our silken bards environ ;
He who would be the tongue of this wide land

Must string his harp with chords of sturdy iron
And strike it with a toil-embrowned hand ;
One who hath dwelt with Nature well-attended,
Who hath learnt wisdom from her mystic books,
Whose soul with all her countless lives hath blended,
So that all beauty awes us in his looks ;
Who not with body's waste his soul hath pampered,
Who as the clear north-western wind is free,
Who walks with Form's observances unhampered,
And follows the One Will obediently ;
Whose eyes, like windows on a breezy summit,
Control a lovely prospect every way ;
Who doth not sound God's sea with earthly plummet,
And find a bottom still of worthless clay ;
Who heeds not how the lower gusts are working,
Knowing that one sure wind blows on above,
And sees, beneath the foulest faces lurking,
One God-built shrine of reverence and love ;
Who sees all stars that wheel their shining marches
Around the centre fixed of Destiny,
Where the encircling soul serene o'er arches
The moving globe of being like a sky ;

Who feels that God and Heaven's great deeps are nearer
Him to whose heart his fellow-man is nigh,
Who doth not hold his soul's own freedom dearer
Than that of all his brethren, low or high ;
Who to the right can feel himself the truer
For being gently patient with the wrong,
Who sees a brother in the evil doer,
And finds in Love the heart's-blood of his song ;—
This, this is he for whom the world is waiting
To sing the beatings of its mighty heart,
Too long hath it been patient with the grating
Of scrannel-pipes, and heard it misnamed Art.
To him the smiling soul of man shall listen,
Laying awhile its crown of thorns aside,
And once again in every eye shall glisten
The glory of a nature satisfied.
His verse shall have a great, commanding motion,
Heaving and swelling with a melody
Learnt of the sky, the river, and the ocean,
And all the pure, majestic things that be.
Awake, then, thou ! we pine for thy great presence
To make us feel the soul once more sublime,

We are of far too infinite an essence
To rest contented with the lies of Time.
Speak out ! and, lo ! a hush of deepest wonder
Shall sink o'er all his many-voiced scene,
As when a sudden burst of rattling thunder
Shatters the blueness of a sky serene.

1841.

THE MOON.

My soul was like the sea,
Before the moon was made,
Moaning in vague immensity,
Of its own strength afraid,
Unrestful and unstaid.

Through every rift it foamed in vain,
About its earthly prison,
Seeking some unknown thing in pain,
And sinking restless back again,
For yet no moon had risen :
Its only voice a vast, dumb moan,
Of utterless anguish speaking,
It lay unhopefully alone,
And lived but in an aimless seeking.

So was my soul ; but, when 'twas full
Of unrest to o'erloading,
A voice of something beautiful
Whispered a dim foreboding,
And yet so soft, so sweet, so low,
It had not more of joy than woe ;
And, as the sea doth oft lie still,
Making its waters meet,
As if by an unconscious will,
For the moon's silver feet,
So lay my soul within mine eyes
When thou, its guardian moon, didst rise.

And now, howe'er its waves above
May toss and seem unceasing,
One strong, eternal law of Love,
With guidance sure and peaceful,
As calm and natural as breath,
Moves its great deeps through life and death.

A GLANCE BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

WE see but half the causes of our deeds,
Seeking them wholly in the outer life,
And heedless of the encircling spirit-world,
Which, though unseen, is felt, and sows in us
All germs of pure and world-wide purposes.
From one stage of our being to the next
We pass unconscious o'er a slender bridge,
The momentary work of unseen hands,
Which crumbles down behind us ; looking back,
We see the other shore, the gulf between,
And, marvelling how we won to where we stand,
Content ourselves to call the builder Chance.
We trace the wisdom to the apple's fall,
Not to the birth-throes of a mighty Truth

Which, for long ages in blank Chaos dumb,
Yet yearned to be incarnate, and had found
At last a spirit meet to be the womb
From which it might leap forth to bless mankind,—
Not to the soul of Newton, ripe with all
The hoarded thoughtfulness of earnest years,
And waiting but one ray of sunlight more
To blossom fully.

But whence came that ray ?

We call our sorrows Destiny, but ought
Rather to name our high successes so.
Only the instincts of great souls are Fate,
And have predestined sway : all other things,
Except by leave of us, could never be.
For Destiny is but the breath of God
Still moving in us, the last fragment left
Of our unfallen nature, waking oft
Within our thought, to beckon us beyond
The narrow circle of the seen and known,
And always tending to a noble end,
As all things must that overrule the soul, .

And for a space unseat the helmsman, Will.
The fate of England and of freedom once
Seemed wavering in the heart of one plain man :
One step of his, and the great dial-hand,
That marks the destined progress of the world
In the eternal round from wisdom on
To higher wisdom, had been made to pause
A hundred years. That step he did not take,—
He knew not why, nor we, but only God,—
And lived to make his simple oaken chair
More terrible and grandly beautiful,
More full of majesty, than any throne,
Before or after, of a British king.

Upon the pier stood two stern-visaged men,
Looking to where a little craft lay moored,
Swayed by the lazy current of the Thames,
Which weltered by in muddy listlessness.
Grave men they were, and battlings of fierce thought
Had trampled out all softness from their brows,
And ploughed rough furrows there before their time,
For other crop than such as home-bred Peace

Sows broadcast in the willing soil of Youth.
Care, not of self, but of the common weal,
Had robbed their eyes of youth, and left instead
A look of patient power and iron will,
And something fiercer, too, that gave broad hint
Of the plain weapons girded at their sides.
The younger had an aspect of command,—
Not such as trickles down, a slender stream,
In the shrunk channel of a great descent,—
But such as lies entowered in heart and head,
And an arm prompt to do the 'hests of both.
His was a brow where gold were out of place,
And yet it seemed right worthy of a crown,
(Though he despised such,) were it only made
Of iron, or some serviceable stuff
That would have matched his sinewy, brown face.
The elder, although such he hardly seemed,
(Care makes so little of some five short years,)
Had a clear, honest face, whose rough-hewn strength
Was mildened by the scholar's wiser heart
To sober courage, such as best befits
The unsullied temper of a well-taught mind,

Yet so remained that one could plainly guess
The hushed volcano smouldering underneath.
He spoke ; the other, hearing, kept his gaze
Still fixed, as on some problem in the sky.

“ O, CROMWELL, we are fallen on evil times !
There was a day when England had wide room
For honest men as well as foolish kings ;
But now the uneasy stomach of the time
Turns squeamish at them both. Therefore let us
Seek out that savage clime where men as yet
Are free : there sleeps the vessel on the tide,
Her languid canvass drooping for the wind ;
Give us but that, and what need we to fear
This Order of the Council ? The free waves
Will not say, No, to please a wayward king,
Nor will the winds turn traitors at his beck :
All things are fitly cared for, and the Lord
Will watch as kindly o’er the Exodus
Of us his servants now, as in old time.
We have no cloud or fire, and haply we
May not pass dry-shod through the ocean-stream ;

But, saved or lost, all things are in His hand.”
So spake he, and meantime the other stood
With wide gray eyes still reading the blank air,
As if upon the sky’s blue wall he saw
Some mystic sentence, written by a hand,
Such as of old did awe the Assyrian king,
Girt with his satraps in the blazing feast.

“HAMPDEN! a moment since, my purpose was
To fly with thee,—for I will call it flight,
Nor flatter it with any smoother name,—
But something in me bids me not to go ;
And I am one, thou knowest, who, unmoved
By what the weak deem omens, yet give heed
And reverence due to whatsoe’er my soul
Whispers of warning to the inner ear.
Moreover, as I know that God brings round
His purposes in ways undreamed by us,
And makes the wicked but his instruments
To hasten on their swift and sudden fall,
I see the beauty of his providence
In the King’s order : blind, he will not let

His doom part from him, but must bid it stay
As 'twere a cricket, whose enlivening chirp
He loved to hear beneath his very hearth.
Why should we fly? Nay, why not rather stay
And rear again our Zion's crumbled walls,
Not, as of old the walls of Thebes were built,
By minstrel twanging, but, if need should be,
With the more potent music of our swords?
Think'st thou that score of men beyond the sea
Claim more God's care than all of England here?
No: when He moves his arm, it is to aid
Whole peoples, heedless if a few be crushed,
As some are ever when the destiny
Of man takes one stride onward nearer home.
Believe it, 'tis the mass of men He loves;
And, where there is most sorrow and most want,
Where the high heart of man is trodden down
The most, 'tis not because He hides his face
From them in wrath, as purblind teachers prate:
Not so: there most is He, for there is He
Most needed. Men who seek for Fate abroad
Are not so near his heart as they who dare

Frankly to face her where she faces them,
On their own threshold, where their souls are strong
To grapple with and throw her ; as I once,
Being yet a boy, did throw this puny king,
Who now has grown so dotard as to deem
That he can wrestle with an angry realm,
And throw the brawned Antæus of men's rights.
No, Hampden ! they have half-way conquered Fate
Who go half-way to meet her,—as will I.
Freedom hath yet a work for me to do ;
So speaks that inward voice which never yet
Spake falsely, when it urged the spirit on
To noble deeds for country and mankind.
And, for success, I ask no more than this,—
To bear unflinching witness to the truth.
All true, whole men succeed ; for what is worth
Success's name, unless it be the thought,
The inward surety, to have carried out
A noble purpose to a noble end,
Although it be the gallows or the block ?
'Tis only Falsehood that doth ever need
These outward shows of gain to bolster her.

Be it we prove the weaker with our swords ;
Truth only needs to be for once spoke out,
And there's such music in her, such strange rhythm,
As make men's memories her joyous slaves,
And cling around the soul, as the sky clings
Round the mute earth, for ever beautiful,
And, if o'erclouded, only to burst forth
More all-embracingly divine and clear :
Get but the truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star new-born, that drops into its place,
And which, once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake.

“ What should we do in that small colony
Of pinched fanatics, who would rather choose
Freedom to clip an inch more from their hair,
Than the great chance of setting England free ?
Not there, amid the stormy wilderness,
Should we learn wisdom ; or, if learned, what room
To put it into act,—else worse than naught ?
We learn our souls more, tossing for an hour
Upon this huge and ever-vexed sea

Of human thought, where kingdoms go to wreck
Like fragile bubbles yonder in the stream,
Than in a cycle of New England sloth,
Broke only by some petty Indian war,
Or quarrel for a letter, more or less,
In some hard word, which, spelt in either way,
Not their most learned clerks can understand.
New times demand new measures and new men ;
The world advances, and in time outgrows
The laws that in our fathers' day were best ;
And, doubtless, after us, some purer scheme
Will be shaped out by wiser men than we,
Made wiser by the steady growth of truth.
We cannot bring Utopia at once ;
But better, almost, be at work in sin,
Than in a brute inaction browse and sleep.
No man is born into the world, whose work
Is not born with him ; there is always work,
And tools to work withal, for those who will ;
And blessed are the horny hands of toil !
The busy world shoves angrily aside
The man who stands with arms akimbo set,

Until occasion tells him what to do ;
And he who waits to have his task marked out
Shall die and leave his errand unfulfilled.
Our time is one that calls for earnest deeds :
Reason and Government, like two broad seas,
Yearn for each other with outstretched arms
Across this narrow isthmus of the throne,
And roll their white surf higher every day.
One age moves onward, and the next builds up
Cities and gorgeous palaces, where stood
The rude log huts of those who tamed the wild,
Rearing from out the forests they had felled
The goodly framework of a fairer state ;
The builder's trowel and the settler's axe
Are seldom wielded by the self-same hand ;
Ours is the harder task, yet not the less
Shall we receive the blessing for our toil
From the choice spirits of the after time.
The field lies wide before us, where to reap
The easy harvest of a deathless name,
Though with no better sickles than our swords,
My soul is not a palace of the past,

Where outworn creeds, like Rome's gray senate, quake,
Hearing afar the Vandal's trumpet hoarse,
That shakes old systems with a thunder-fit.
The time is ripe, and rotten-ripe, for change ;
Then let it come : I have no dread of what
Is called for by the instinct of mankind ;
Nor think I that God's world will fall apart,
Because we tear a parchment more or less.
Truth is eternal, but her effluence,
With endless change, is fitted to the hour ;
Her mirror is turned forward, to reflect
The promise of the future, not the past.
He who would win the name of truly great
Must understand his own age and the next,
And make the present ready to fulfil
Its prophecy, and with the future merge
Gently and peacefully, as wave with wave.
The future works out great men's destinies ;
The present is enough for common souls,
Who, never looking forward, are indeed
Mere clay wherein the footprints of their age
Are petrified for ever : better those

Who lead the blind old giant by the hand
From out the pathless desert where he gropes,
And set him onward in his darksome way.
I do not fear to follow out the truth,
Albeit along the precipice's edge.
Let us speak plain : there is more force in names
Than most men dream of ; and a lie may keep
Its throne a whole age longer, if it skulk
Behind the shield of some fair-seeming name.
Let us call tyrants, *tyrants*, and maintain,
That only freedom comes by grace of God,
And all that comes not by his grace must fall ;
For men in earnest have no time to waste
In patching fig-leaves for the naked truth.

“ I will have one more grapple with the man
Charles Stuart : whom the boy o’ercame,
The man stands not in awe of. I, perchance,
Am one raised up by the Almighty arm
To witness some great truth to all the world.
Souls destined to o’erleap the vulgar lot,
And mould the world unto the scheme of God,

Have a foreconsciousness of their high doom ;
As men are known to shiver at the heart,
When the cold shadow of some coming ill
Creeps slowly o'er their spirits unawares.
Hath Good less power of prophecy than Ill ?
How else could men whom God hath called to sway
Earth's rudder, and to steer the bark of Truth,
Beating against the wind toward her port,
Bear all the mean and buzzing grievances,
The petty martyrdoms, wherewith Sin strives
To weary out the tethered hope of Faith,
'The sneers, the unrecognising look of friends,
Who worship the dead corpse of old king Custom,
Where it doth lie in state within the Church,
Striving to cover up the mighty ocean
With a man's palm, and making even the truth
Lie for them, holding up a glass reversed,
To make the hope of man seem further off ?
My God ! when I read o'er the bitter lives
Of men whose eager hearts were quite too great
To beat beneath the cramped mode of the day,
And see them mocked at by the world they love,

Haggling with prejudice for pennyworths
Of that reform which their hard toil will make
The common birthright of the age to come,—
When I see this, spite of my faith in God,
I marvel how their hearts bear up so long ;
Nor could they, but for this same prophecy,
This inward feeling of the glorious end.

“ Deem me not fond ; but in my warmer youth,
Ere my heart's bloom was soiled and brushed away,
I had great dreams of mighty things to come ;
Of conquest, whether by the sword or pen
I knew not ; but some conquest I would have,
Or else swift death : now, wiser grown in years,
I find youth's dreams are but the flutterings
Of those strong wings whercon the soul shall soar
In aftertime to win a starry throne ;
And so I cherish them, for they were lots
Which I, a boy, cast in the helm of Fate.
Now will I draw them, since a man's right hand,
A right hand guided by an earnest soul,
With a true instinct, takes the golden prize

From out a thousand blanks. What men call luck
Is the prerogative of valiant souls,
The fealty life pays its rightful kings.
The helm is shaking now, and I will stay
To pluck my lot forth ; it were sin to flee !”

So they two turned together ; one to die,
Fighting for freedom on the bloody field ;
The other, far more happy, to become
A name earth wears for ever next her heart ;
One of the few that have a right to rank
With the true Makers : for his spirit wrought
Order from Chaos ; proved that right divine
Dwelt only in the excellence of Truth ;
And far within old Darkness’ hostile lines
Advanced and pitched the shining tents of Light.
Nor shall the grateful Muse forget to tell,
That—not the least among his many claims
To deathless honour—he was MILTON’S friend,
A man not second among those who lived
To show us that the poet’s lyre demands
An arm of tougher sinew than the sword.

THE FORLORN.

The night is dark, the stinging sleet,
Swept by the bitter gusts of air,
Drives whistling down the lonely street,
And stiffens on the pavement bare.

The street-lamps flare and struggle dim
Through the white sleet-clouds as they pass,
Or, governed by a boisterous whim,
Drop down and rattle on the glass.

One poor, heart-broken, outcast girl
Faces the east-wind's searching flaws,
And, as about her heart they whirl,
Her tattered cloak more tightly draws.

The flat brick walls look cold and bleak,
Her bare feet to the side-walk freeze ;
Yet dares she not a shelter seek,
Though faint with hunger and disease.

The sharp storm cuts her forehead bare,
And, piercing through her garments thin,
Beats on her shrunken breast, and there
Makes colder the cold heart within.

She lingers where a ruddy glow
Streams outward through an open shutter,
Giving more bitterness to woe,
More liveness to desertion utter.

One half the cold she had not felt,
Until she saw this gush of light
Spread warmly forth, and seem to melt
Its slow way through the deadening night.

She hears a woman's voice within,
Singing sweet words her childhood knew,

And years of misery and sin
Furl off and leave her heaven blue.

Her freezing heart, like one who sinks
Outwearied in the drifting snow,
Drowzes to deadly sleep, and thinks
No longer of its hopeless woe :

Old fields, and clear blue summer days,
Old meadows, green with grass and trees,
That shimmer through the trembling haze
And whiten in the western breeze,—

Old faces,—all the friendly past
Rises within her heart again,
And sunshine from her childhood east
Makes summer of the icy rain.

Enhaloed by a mild, warm glow,
From all humanity apart,
She hears old footsteps wandering slow
Through the lone chambers of her heart.

Outside the porch before the door,
Her cheek upon the cold, hard stone,
She lies, no longer foul and poor,
No longer dreary and alone.

Next morning, something heavily
Against the opening door did weigh,
And there, from sin and sorrow free,
A woman on the threshold lay.

A smile upon the wan lips told
That she had found a calm release,
And that, from out the want and cold,
The song had borne her soul in peace.

For, whom the heart of Man shuts out,
Straightway the heart of God takes in,
And fences them all round about
With silence mid the world's loud din ;

And one of his great charities
Is Music, and it doth not scorn

To close the lids upon the eyes
Of the polluted and forlorn ;

Far was she from her childhood's home,
Farther in guilt had wandered thence,
Yet thither it had bid her come
To die in maiden innocence.

SONG.



O, MOONLIGHT deep and tender,
A year and more ago,
Your mist of golden splendour
Round my betrothal shone !

O, elm-leaves dark and dewy,
The very same ye seem,
The low wind trembles through ye.
Ye murmur in my dream !

O, river, dim with distance,
Flow thus for ever by,
A part of my existence
Within your heart doth lie !

O, stars, ye saw our meeting,
Two beings and one soul,
Two hearts so madly beating
To mingle and be whole !

O, happy night, deliver
Her kisses back to me,
Or keep them all, and give her
A blissful dream of me !

MIDNIGHT.

THE moon shines white and silent
On the mist, which, like a tide
Of some enchanted ocean,
O'er the wide marsh doth glide,
Spreading its ghost-like billows
Silently far and wide.

A vague and starry magic
Makes all things mysteries,
And lures the earth's dumb spirit
Up to the longing skies,—
I seem to hear dim whispers,
And tremulous replies.

The fireflies o'er the meadow
In pulses come and go ;
The elm trees' heavy shadow
Weighs on the grass below ;
And faintly from the distance
The dreaming cock doth crow.

All things look strange and mystic,
The very bushes swell
And take wild shapes and motions,
As if beneath a spell,—
They seem not the same lilacs
From childhood known so well.

The snow of deepest silence
O'er everything doth fall,
So beautiful and quiet,
And yet so like a pall,—
As if all life were ended,
And rest were come to all.

O, wild and wondrous midnight,
There is a might in thee
To make the charmed body
Almost like spirit be,
And give it some faint glimpses
Of immortality !

1842.

A PRAYER.

GOD ! do not let my loved-one die,

But rather wait until the time

That I am grown in purity

Enough to enter thy pure clime,

Then take me, I will gladly go,

So that my love remain below !

O, let her stay ! She is by birth

What I through death must learn to be,

We need her more on our poor earth,

Than thou canst need in heaven with thee :

She hath her wings already, I

Must burst this earth-shell ere I fly.

Then, God, take me ! We shall be near,
More near than ever, each to each :
Her angel ears will find more clear
My heavenly than my earthly speech ;
And still, as I draw near to thee,
Her soul and mine shall closer be.

FANTASY.

ROUND and round me she waved swinging,
Like a wreath of smoke,
In a clear, low gurgle singing
What may ne'er be spoke ;
Her white arms floated on the air,
Like swans upon a stream,
So stately fair, beyond compare,
Their gracefulness did seem,
And I knew, by the splendour of her hair,
That all must be a dream ;
For round her limbs it went and came,
Hither and thither,
I knew not whither,
Fitfully like a wind-waved flame,—

But bright and golden as flame was never,—
And it flowed back and forth,
Like the lights of the north,
Round her and round her for ever and ever !

She filled the cup of melody
With madness to the brim,
And wild, wild songs she sang to me
That made my brain grow dim,
Like those that throng the traveller's mind,
When night drops down before and behind,
And he can hear naught but the lonely wind
In the bleak pines over him :
How may I tell
The sea-like swell
Of ever-growing melody,
That drifted her words,
Like white sea-birds,
Swinging and heaving on to me ?

Her song came like a sudden breeze ;
It wound through my heart

With a flashing dart,
As a bird winds through the trees ;
'Twas like a brook flowing,
'Twas like a wind blowing,
'Twas like a star and like a river,
'Twas like all things that weary never,—
It rhymed with the grass and the open sky,
With a billowy roll,
It flooded my soul,
And thrilled it with fearful ecstasy ;
It was calm as music e'er can be,
But an inward might was in its motion,
A consciousness of majesty,
Like the heart of the unruffled ocean,
Which, clear and still, by breeze unshent,
With a world-wide throe,
Heaves to and fro
From continent to continent.

THE HERITAGE.

THE rich man's son inherits lands,
And piles of brick, and stone, and gold,
And he inherits soft, white hands,
And tender flesh that fears the cold,
Nor dares to wear a garment old ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

The rich man's son inherits cares ;
The bank may break, the factory burn,
A breath may burst his bubble shares,
And soft, white hands could hardly earn
A living that would serve his turn ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

The rich man's son inherits wants,
His stomach craves for dainty fare ;
With sated heart, he hears the pants
Of toiling hinds with brown arms bare,
And wearies in his easy-chair ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit ?
Stout muscles and a sinewy heart,
A hardy frame, a hardier spirit ;
King of two hands, he does his part
In every useful toil and art ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit ?
Wishes o'erjoyed with humble things,
A rank adjudged by toil-won merit,
Content that from employment springs,
A heart that in his labour sings ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit ?

A patience learned of being poor,
Courage, if sorrow come, to bear it,

A fellow-feeling that is sure
To make the outcast bless his door ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

O, rich man's son ! there is a toil,

That with all others level stands ;
Large charity doth never soil,
But only whiten, soft, white hands,—
This is the best crop from thy lands
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being rich to hold in fee.

O, poor man's son ! scorn not thy state ;

There is worse weariness than thine,
In merely being rich and great ;
Toil only gives the soul to shine,
And makes rest fragrant and benign ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being poor to hold in fee.

Both, heirs to some six feet of sod,
Are equal in the earth at last ;
Both, children of the same dear God,
Prove title to your heirship vast
By record of a well-filled past ;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Well worth a life to hold in fee.

THE ROSE : A BALLAD.

I.

IN his tower sat the poet
Gazing on the roaring sea,
“Take this rose,” he sighed, “and throw it
Where there ’s none that loveth me.
On the rock the billow bursteth
And sinks back into the seas.
But in vain my spirit thirsteth
So to burst and be at ease.
Take, O, sea ! the tender blossom
That hath lain against my breast ;
On thy black and angry bosom
It will find a surer rest.

Life is vain, and love is hollow,
 Ugly death stands there behind,
Hate and scorn and hunger follow
 Him that toileth for his kind.”
Forth into the night he hurled it,
 And with bitter smile did mark
How the surly tempest whirled it
 Swift into the hungry dark.
Foam and spray drive back to leeward,
 And the gale, with dreary moan,
Drifts the helpless blossom seaward,
 Through the breakers all alone.

II.

Stands a maiden, on the morrow,
 Musing by the wave-beat strand,
Half in hope and half in sorrow,
 Tracing words upon the sand :
“ Shall I ever then behold him
 Who hath been my life so long,—
Ever to this sick heart fold him,—
 Be the spirit of his song ?

Touch not, sea, the blessed letters
I have traced upon thy shore,
Spare his name whose spirit fetters
Mine with love for evermore !”
Swells the tide and overflows it,
But, with omen pure and meet,
Brings a little rose, and throws it
Humbly at the maiden’s feet.
Full of bliss she takes the token,
And, upon her snowy breast,
Soothes the ruffled petals broken
With the ocean’s fierce unrest.
“ Love is thine, O, heart ! and surely
Peace shall also be thine own,
For the heart that trusteth purely
Never long can pine alone.”

III.

In his tower sits the poet,
Blisses new and strange to him
Fill his heart and overflow it
With a wonder sweet and dim.

Up the beach the ocean slideth
 With a whisper of delight,
And the moon in silence glideth
 Through the peaceful blue of night.
Rippling o'er the poet's shoulder
 Flows a maiden's golden hair,
Maiden-lips, with love grown bolder,
 Kiss his moon-lit forehead bare.
"Life is joy, and love is power,
 Death all fetters doth unbind,
Strength and wisdom only flower
 When we toil for all our kind.
Hope is truth,—the future giveth
 More than present takes away,
And the soul for ever liveth
 Nearer God from day to day."
Not a word the maiden uttered,
 Fullest hearts are slow to speak,
But a withered rose-leaf fluttered
 Down upon the poet's cheek.

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF DR. CHANNING.

I do not come to weep above thy pall,
And mourn the dying-out of noble powers ;
The poet's clearer eye should see, in all
Earth's seeming woe, the seed of Heaven's flowers.

Truth needs no champions : in the infinite deep
Of everlasting Soul her strength abides,
From Nature's heart her mighty pulses leap,
Through Nature's veins her strength, undying, tides.

Peace is more strong than war, and gentleness,
Where force were vain, makes conquests o'er the
And love lives on and hath a power to bless, [wave ;
When they who loved are hidden in the grave.

The sculptured marble brags of death-strewn fields,
 And Glory's epitaph is writ in blood ;
 But Alexander now to Plato yields,
 Clarkson will stand where Wellington hath stood.

I watch the circle of the eternal years,
 And read for ever in the storied page
 One lengthened roll of blood, and wrong, and tears,—
 One onward step of Truth from age to age.

The poor are crushed ; the tyrants link their chain ;
 The poet sings through narrow dungeon-grates ;
 Man's hope lies quenched ;—and, lo ! with steadfast
 Freedom doth forge her mail of adverse fates. [gain

Men slay the prophets ; fagot, rack, and cross
 Make up the groaning record of the past ;
 But Evil's triumphs are her endless loss,
 And sovereign Beauty wins the soul at last.

No power can die that ever wrought for Truth ;
 Thereby a law of Nature it became,

And lives unwithered in its sinewy youth,
When he who called it forth is but a name.

Therefore I cannot think thee wholly gone ;
The better part of thee is with us still ;
Thy soul its hampering clay aside hath thrown,
And only freer wrestles with the Ill.

Thou livest in the life of all good things ;
What words thou spak'st for Freedom shall not die ;
Thou sleepest not, for now thy Love hath wings
To soar where hence thy Hope could hardly fly.

And often, from that other world, on this
Some gleams from great souls gone before may
To shed on struggling hearts a clearer bliss, [shine,
And clothe the Right with lustre more divine.

Thou art not idle : in thy higher sphere
Thy spirit bends itself to loving tasks,
And strength, to perfect what it dreamed of here,
Is all the crown and glory that it asks.

For sure, in Heaven's wide chambers, there is room
 For love and pity, and for helpful deeds ;
 Else were our summons thither but a doom
 To life more vain than this in clayey weeds.

From off the starry mountain-peak of song,
 Thy spirit shows me, in the coming time,
 An earth unwithered by the foot of wrong,
 A race revering its own soul sublime.

What wars, what martyrdoms, what crimes, may come,
 Thou knowest not, nor I ; but God will lead
 The prodigal soul from want and sorrow home,
 And Eden ope her gates to Adam's seed.

Farewell ! good man, good angel now ! this hand
 Soon, like thine own, shall lose its cunning, too ;
 Soon shall this soul, like thine, bewildered stand,
 Then leap to thread the free, unfathomed blue :

When that day comes, O, may this hand grow cold,
 Busy, like thine, for Freedom and the Right ;

O, may this soul, like thine, be ever bold
To face dark Slavery's encroaching blight !

This laurel-leaf I cast upon thy bier ;
Let worthier hands than these thy wreath entwine ;
Upon thy hearse I shed no useless tear,—
For me weep rather thou in calm divine !

1842.

STANZAS

SUNG AT THE ANTI-SLAVERY PICNIC IN DEDHAM, ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF WEST-INDIA EMANCIPATION, AUGUST 1, 1843.

MEN ! whose boast it is that ye
 Come of fathers brave and free,
 If there breathe on earth a slave,
 Are ye truly free and brave ?
 If ye do not feel the chain,
 When it works a brother's pain,
 Are ye not base slaves indeed,—
 Slaves unworthy to be freed ?

Women ! who shall one day bear
 Sons to breathe New England air,
 If ye hear, without a blush,
 Deeds to make the roused blood rush

Like red lava through your veins,
For your sisters now in chains,—
Answer ! are ye fit to be
Mothers of the brave and free ?

Is true Freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt ?
No ! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And, with heart and hand, to be
Earnest to make others free !

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak ;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think ;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

SILENCE.



WHEN the cup of hope brims over
And the soul hath drunk its fill,
When the loved-one meets the lover
And their hearts in sunshine hover
With one impulse and one will,—
Then the useless tongue is still.

When the heart is bare of gladness,
And the helpless sense of ill
Goads the apathy of sadness
Onward, through a whirl of madness,
To a darkness drear and chill,—
Then the palsied tongue is still.

When the soul for power sightheth,
Struggling for Art's fuller skill,
And the prophet heart o'erflieth
All the agony that trieth,
All the tear-drops it must spill,—
Then the tranced tongue is still.

When two hearts that love are parted,
And truth lingers but to kill,
When they strive to be hard-hearted,
And the props of life are started
With a terror and a thrill,—
Then the choking tongue is still.

When our souls youth's dream-chains shiver,
And we leap the World's scant rill,
Which had seemed a mighty river
Roaring on and on for ever
'Tween us and Self-trust's steep hill,—
Then the trembling tongue is still.

O, sweet Silence ! they belied thee
Who have called thee vain and weak ;
Speech is emptiness beside thee,
Joy and woe have glorified thee,
Love and longing never seek
Any better way to speak.

All the deepest thoughts and feelings
Which the roots of life enfold,
Passion's sudden shocks and reelings,
Love's first tremulous revealings,
Never can be fully told,
Save by thee, revered of old !

A CHIPPEWA LEGEND.*

*ἀλγεινὰ μὲν μοι καὶ λέγειν ἐστὶν τάδε
 ἄλγος δὲ σιγᾶν.*

Æschylus, Prom. Vinet. 197.

THE old Chief, feeling now well-nigh his end,
 Called his two eldest children to his side,
 And gave them, in few words, his parting charge :
 “ My son and daughter, me ye see no more ;
 The happy hunting-grounds await me, green
 With change of spring and summer through the year :
 But, for remembrance, after I am gone,
 Be kind to little Sheemah for my sake :
 Weakling he is and young, and knows not yet
 To set the trap, or draw the seasoned bow ;

* For the leading incidents in this tale, I am indebted to the very valuable “ *Algic Researches*” of Henry R. Schoolcraft, Esq.

Therefore of both your loves he hath more need,
And he, who needeth love, to love hath right ;
It is not like our furs and stores of corn,
Whereto we claim sole title by our toil,
But the Great Spirit plants it in our hearts,
And waters it, and gives it sun, to be
The common stock and heritage of all :
Therefore be kind to Sheemah, that yourselves
May not be left deserted in your need."

Alone, beside a lake, their wigwam stood,
Far from the other dwellings of their tribe ;
And, after many moons, the loneliness
Wearied the elder brother, and he said,
" Why should I dwell here all alone, shut out
From the free, natural joys that fit my age ?
Lo, I am tall and strong, well-skilled to hunt,
Patient of toil and hunger, and not yet
Have seen the danger which I dared not look
Full in the face ; what hinders me to be
A mighty Brave and Chief among my kin ?"
So, taking up his arrows and his bow,

As if to hunt, he journeyed swiftly on,
Until he gained the wigwams of his tribe,
Where, choosing out a bride, he soon forgot,
In all the fret and bustle of new life,
The little Sheemah and his father's charge.

Now when the sister found her brother gone,
And that, for many days, he came not back,
She wept for Sheemah more than for herself;
For Love bides longest in a woman's heart,
And flutters many times before he flies,
And then doth perch so nearly, that a word
May lure him back, as swift and glad as light;
And Duty lingers even when Love is gone,
Oft looking out in hope of his return;
And, after Duty hath been driven forth,
Then Selfishness creeps in the last of all,
Warming her lean hands at the lonely hearth,
And crouching o'er the embers, to shut out
Whatever paltry warmth and light are left,
With avaricious greed, from all beside.
So, for long months, the sister hunted wide,

And cared for little Sheemah tenderly :
But, daily more and more, the loneliness
Grew wearisome, and to herself she sighed.
“ Am I not fair ? at least the glassy pool,
That hath no cause to flatter, tells me so ;
But, O, how flat and meaningless the tale,
Unless it tremble on a lover's tongue !
Beauty hath no true glass, except it be
In the sweet privacy of loving eyes.”
Thus deemed she idly, and forgot the lore
Which she had learned of nature and the woods,
That beauty's chief reward is to itself,
And that the eyes of Love reflect alone
The inward fairness, which is blurred and lost
Unless kept clear and white by Duty's care.
So she went forth and sought the haunts of men,
And, being wedded, in her household cares,
Soon, like the elder brother, quite forgot
The little Sheemah and her father's charge.

But Sheemah, left alone within the lodge,
Waited and waited, with a shrinking heart,
Thinking each rustle was his sister's step,

Till hope grew less and less, and then went out,
And every sound was changed from hope to fear.
Few sounds there were :—the dropping of a nut,
The squirrel's chirrup, and the jay's harsh scream,
Autumn's sad remnants of blithe Summer's cheer,
Heard at long intervals, seemed but to make
The dreadful void of silence silenter.

Soon what small store his sister left was gone,
And, through the Autumn, he made shift to live
On roots and berries, gathered in much fear
Of wolves, whose ghastly howl he heard ofttimes,
Hollow and hungry, at the dead of night.

But Winter came at last, and, when the snow,
Thick-heaped for gleaming leagues o'er hill and plain,
Spread its unbroken silence over all,
Made bold by hunger, he was fain to glean,
(More sick at heart than Ruth, and all alone,)
After the harvest of the merciless wolf,
Grim Boaz, who, sharp-ribbed and gaunt, yet feared
A thing more wild and starving than himself ;
Till, by degrees, the wolf and he grew friends,
And shared together all the winter through.

Late in the Spring, when all the ice was gone,
The elder brother, fishing in the lake,
Upon whose edge his father's wigwam stood,
Heard a low moaning noise upon the shore :
Half like a child it seemed, half like a wolf,
And straightway there was something in his heart
That said, "It is thy brother Sheemah's voice."
So, paddling swiftly to the bank, he saw,
Within a little thicket close at hand,
A child that seemed fast changing to a wolf,
From the neck downward, gray with shaggy hair,
That still crept on and upward as he looked.
The face was turned away, but well he knew
That it was Sheemah's, even his brother's face.
Then with his trembling hands he hid his eyes,
And bowed his head, so that he might not see
The first look of his brother's eyes, and cried,
"O, Sheemah ! O, my brother, speak to me !
Dost thou not know me, that I am thy brother ?
Come to me, little Sheemah, thou shalt dwell
With me henceforth, and know no care or want !"
Sheemah was silent for a space, as if

"Twere hard to summon up a human voice,
And, when he spake, the sound was of a wolf's :
" I know thee not, nor art thou what thou say'st ;
I have none other brethren than the wolves,
And, till thy heart be changed from what it is,
Thou art not worthy to be called their kin."
Then groaned the other, with a choking tongue,
" Alas ! my heart is changed right bitterly ;
'Tis shrunk and parched within me even now !"
And, looking upward fearfully, he saw
Only a wolf that shrank away and ran,
Ugly and fierce, to hide among the woods.

This rude, wild legend hath an inward sense,
Which it were well we all should lay to heart ;
For have not we our younger brothers, too,
The poor, the outcast, and the trodden-down,
Left fatherless on earth to pine for bread ?
'They are a-hungred for our love and care,
It is their spirits that are famishing,
And our dear Father, in his Testament,
Bequeathed them to us as our dearest trust,

Whereof we shall give up a strait account.
Woe, if we have forgotten them, and left
Those souls that might have grown so fair and glad,
That only wanted a kind word from us,
To be so free and gently beautiful,—
Left them to feel their birthright as a curse,
To grow all lean, and cramped, and full of sores,
And last,—sad change, that surely comes to all
Shut out from manhood by their brother-man,—
To turn mere wolves, for lack of aught to love !

Hear it, O England ! thou who liest asleep
On a volcano, from whose pent-up wrath,
Already some red flashes, bursting up,
Glare bloodily on coronet and crown
And gray cathedral looming huge aloof,
With dreadful portent of o'erhanging doom !
Thou Dives among nations ! from whose board,
After the dogs are fed, poor Lazarus,
Crooked and worn with toil, and hollow-eyed,
Begs a few crumbs in vain !

I honour thee

For all the lessons thou hast taught the world,
Not few nor poor, and freedom chief of all ;
I honour thee for thy huge energy,
Thy tough endurance, and thy fearless heart :
And how could man, who speaks with English words,
Think lightly of the blessed womb that bare
Shakspeare and Milton, and full many more
Whose names are now our earth's sweet lullabies,
Wherewith she cheers the infancy of those
Who are to do her honour in their lives ?
Yct I would bid thee, ere too late, beware,
Lest, while thou playest off thine empty farce
Of Queenship to out-face a grinning world,
Patching thy purple out with filthy rags,
To make thy madness a more bitter scoff,
Thy starving millions,—who not only pine
For body's bread, but for the bread of life,
The light, which from their eyes is quite shut out
By the broad mockery of thy golden roof,—
Should turn to wolves that hanker for thy blood.
Even now their cry, which, o'er the ocean-stream,

Wanders, and moans upon the awe-struck ear,
Clear-heard above the sea's eternal wail,
But deeper far, and mournfuller, than that,
(For nought so fathomless as woe unshared,) Hath learned a savage meaning of the wolf,
Whose nature now half-triumphs in the heart
Of the world-exiled and despairing Man.

And thou, my country, who to me art dear
As is the blood that circles through my heart,
To whom God granted it in charge to be
Freedom's apostle to a trampled world,
Who shouldst have been a mighty name to shake
Old lies and shams, as with a voice from Heaven,
Art little better than a sneer and mock.
And tyrants smile to see thee holding up
Freedom's broad Ægis o'er three million slaves !
Shall God forget himself to humour thee ?
Shall Justice lie to screen thine ugly sin ?
Shall the eternal laws of truth become
Cobwebs to let thy foul oppression through ?
Shall the untiring Vengeance, that pursues,

Age after age, upon the sinner's track,
Roll back his burning deluge at thy beck ?
Woe ! woe ! Even now I see thy star drop down,
Waning and pale, its faint disc flecked with blood,
That had been set in heaven gloriously,
To beacon Man to Freedom and to Home !
Woe ! woe ! I hear the loathsome serpent hiss,
Trailing, unharmed, its slow and bloated folds
O'er the lone ruins of thy Capitol !
I see those outcast millions turned to wolves,
That howl and snarl o'er Freedom's gory corse,
And lap the ebbing heart's-blood of that Hope,
Which would have made our earth smile back on
A happy child upon a happy mother, [heaven,
From whose ripe breast it drew the milk of life.

But no, my country ! other thoughts than these
Befit a son of thine : serener thoughts
Befit the heart which can, unswerved, believe
That Wrong already feels itself o'ercome,
If but one soul have strength to see the right,
Or one free tongue dare speak it. All mankind

Look, with an anxious flutter of the heart,
To see thee working out thy glorious doom.
Thou shalt not, with a lie upon thy lips,
For ever prop up cunning despotisms,
And help to strengthen every tyrant's plea,
By striving to make man's deep soul content
With a half-truth that feeds it with mere wind.
God judgeth us by what we know of right,
Rather than what we practise that is wrong,
Unknowingly ; and thou shalt yet be bold
To stand before Him, with a heart made clean
By doing that He taught thee how to preach.
Thou yet shalt do thy holy errand ; yet,
That little Mayflower, convoyed by the winds
And the rude waters to our rocky shore,
Shall scatter Freedom's seed throughout the world,
And all the nations of the earth shall come,
Singing, to share the harvest-home of Truth.



SONNETS.



SONNETS.

I.

THROUGH suffering and sorrow thou hast passed
To show us what a woman true may be :
They have not taken sympathy from thee,
Nor made thee any other than thou wast ;
Save as some tree, which, in a sudden blast,
Sheddeth those blossoms, that are weakly grown,
Upon the air, but keepeth every one
Whose strength gives warrant of good fruit at last :
So thou hast shed some blooms of gaiety,
But never one of steadfast cheerfulness ;
Nor hath thy knowledge of adversity
Robbed thee of any faith in happiness,
But rather cleared thine inner eyes to see
How many simple ways there are to bless.

II.

WHAT were I, Love, if I were stripped of thee,
If thine eyes shut me out, whereby I live,
Thou, who unto my calmed soul dost give
Knowledge, and Truth, and holy Mystery,
Wherein Truth mainly lies for those who see
Beyond the earthly and the fugitive,
Who in the grandeur of the soul believe,
And only in the Infinite are free ?
Without thee I were naked, bleak, and bare
As yon dead cedar on the sea-cliff's brow ;
And Nature's teachings, which come to me now
Common and beautiful as light and air,
Would be as fruitless as a stream which still
Slips through the wheel of some old ruined mill.

III.

IMPATIENCE AND REPROOF.

YES, I have felt a weariness of soul,
A shaking of my loveful faith in man,
Jostling with souls that ne'er beyond life's span
Have glimpsed, to whom this empty earth is goal
And starting-place, and death the dreadful whole;
But as, within the parlour's glare, at night,
Amid loud laugh, and converse vain and light,
Sudden without is heard the thunder's roll,
Deep-toned and infinite, with sad reproof,—
So, when my love and faith in man are shaken,
Great, inborn thoughts, that will not keep aloof,
Within my soul like those far thunders, waken,
Growing and growing, till its depths are dinned
With the sad sense of having deadly sinned.

IV.

REFORMERS.

IF ye have not the one great lesson learned,
Which grows in leaves, tides in the mighty sea,
And in the stars eternally hath burned,
That only full obedience is free,—
If ye in pride your true birthright have spurned,
Or, for a mess of potage, beggarly
Have sold it, how, in Truth's name, have ye earned
The holy right to fight for Liberty?
Be free, and then our God will give a sword
Where for Orion's belt were not too bright;
There shall be power in your lightest word
To make weak Falsehood, pierced with arrowy light,
Writhe, dying of her own most foul disease,
Within her churches and her palaces!

V.

THE FIERY TRIAL.

THE hungry flame hath never yet been hot
To him who won his name and crown of fire ;
But it doth ask a stronger soul and higher
To bear, not longing for a prouder lot,
Those martyrdoms whereof the world knows not,—
Hope sneaped with frosty scorn, the faith of youth
Wasted in seeming vain defence of Truth,
Greatness o'ertopped with baseness, and fame got
Too late :—Yet this most bitter task was meant
For those right worthy in such cause to plead,
And therefore God sent poets, men content
To live in humbleness and body's need,
If they may tread the path where Jesus went,
And sow one grain of Love's eternal seed.

VI.

GREAT Truths are portions of the soul of man ;
Great souls are portions of Eternity ;
Each drop of blood, that e'er through true heart ran
With lofty message, ran for thee and me ;
For God's law, since the starry song began,
Hath been, and still for ever more must be,
That every deed which shall outlast Time's span
Must goad the soul to be erect and free ;
Slave is no word of deathless lineage sprung,—
Too many noble souls have thought and died,
Too many mighty poets lived and sung,
And our good Saxon, from lips purified
With martyr-fire, throughout the world hath rung
Too long to have God's holy cause denied.

VII.

I ASK not for those thoughts, that sudden leap
From being's sea, like the isle-seeming Kraken,
With whose great rise the ocean all is shaken
And a heart-tremble quivers through the deep ;
Give me that growth which some perchance deem
Wherewith the steadfast coral-stems arise, [sleep,
Which, by the toil of gathering energies,
Their upward way into clear sunshine keep,
Until, by Heaven's sweetest influences,
Slowly and slowly spreads a speck of green
Into a pleasant island in the seas,
Where, mid tall palms, the cane-roofed home is seen,
And wearied men shall sit at sunset's hour,
Hearing the leaves and loving God's dear power.

VIII.

TO —, ON HER BIRTH-DAY.

MAIDEN, when such a soul as thine is born,
The morning-stars their ancient music make,
And, joyful, once again their song awake,
Long silent now with melancholy scorn ;
And thou, not mindless of so blest a morn,
By no least deed its harmony shalt break,
But shalt to that high chime thy footsteps take,
Through life's most darksome passes, unforlorn ;
Therefore from thy pure faith thou shalt not fall,
Therefore shalt thou be ever fair and free,
And, in thine every motion, musical
As summer air, majestic as the sea,
A mystery to those who creep and crawl
Through Time, and part it from Eternity.

IX.

MY Love, I have no fear that thou shouldst die ;
Albeit I ask no fairer life than this,
Whose numbering-clock is still thy gentle kiss,
While 'Time and Peace with hands enlocked fly,—
Yet care I not where in Eternity
We live and love, well knowing that there is
No backward step for those who feel the bliss
Of Faith as their most lofty yearnings high :
Love hath so purified my heart's strong core,
Meseems I scarcely should be startled, even,
To find, some morn, that thou hadst gone before ;
Since, with thy love, this knowledge too was given,
Which each calm day doth strengthen more and more,
That they who love are but one step from Heaven.

X.

I CANNOT think that thou shouldst pass away,
Whose life to mine is an eternal law,
A piece of nature that can have no flaw,
A new and certain sunrise every day ;
But, if thou art to be another ray
About the Sun of Life, and art to live
Free from all of thee that was fugitive,
The debt of Love I will more fully pay,
Not downcast with the thought of thee so high,
But rather raised to be a nobler man,
And more divine in my humanity,
As knowing that the waiting eyes which scan
My life are lighted by a purer being,
And ask meek, calm-browed deeds, with it agreeing.

XI.

THE HAVEN.

INTO the unruffled shelter of thy love
My bark leapt homeward from a rugged sea,
And furled its sails, and dropped right peacefully
Hope's anchor, quiet as a nested dove :
Thou givest me all that can the true soul move
To nobleness,—a clear simplicity,
That, in the humblest man to-day, can see
Theme for high rhyme as ever poet wove,—
A noiseless love that makes things common rare,
And custom-weary toil with heaven rife,—
A faith that finds great meanings everywhere,
That, to the soul's high level, raiseth life,
And puts in eyes, that could but dimly see,
The calm, vast presence of Eternity.

XII.

RESOLVE.

IN very truth, thou never art away,
Though miles between us cheat mine outward sense ;
For I do feel thee, both by night and day,
A hope fulfilled, a starry influence,
That floweth through my most forgetful deed,
And maketh crystal every part of me,
Sowing the common earth with golden seed,
Bright as if dropped down from the Galaxy :
In sooth, when we have seemed most far divided,
I inly felt we were most truly near,
For then a light from thy great love hath glided,
Through all that desert space, to give me cheer,
And, as light only where it strikes we see,
Men shall know this in my nobility.

XIII.

THERE never yet was flower fair in vain,
Let classic poets rhyme it as they will ;
The seasons toil that it may blow again,
And summer's heart doth feel its every ill ;
Nor is a true soul ever born for naught ;
Wherever any such hath lived and died,
There hath been something for true freedom wrought,
Some bulwark levelled on the evil side :
Toil on, then, Greatness ! thou art in the right,
However narrow souls may call thee wrong ;
Be as thou wouldst be in thine own clear sight,
And so thou wilt in all the world's ere long ;
For worldlings cannot, struggle as they may,
From man's great soul one great thought hide away.

1841.

XIV.

SUB PONDERE CRESCIT.

THE hope of Truth grows stronger, day by day ;
I hear the soul of Man around me waking,
Like a great sea, its frozen fetters breaking,
And flinging up to heaven its sunlit spray,
Tossing huge continents in scornful play,
And crushing them, with din of grinding thunder,
That makes old emptinesses stare in wonder ;
The memory of a glory passed away
Lingers in every heart, as, in the shell,
Ripples the bygone freedom of the sea,
And, every hour, new signs of promise tell
That the great soul shall once again be free,
For high, and yet more high, the murmurs swell
Of inward strife for truth and liberty.

XV.

TO THE SPIRIT OF KEATS.

GREAT soul, thou sittest with me in my room,
Uplifting me with thy vast, quiet eyes,
On whose full orbs, with kindly lustre, lies
The twilight warmth of ruddy ember-gloom :
Thy clear, strong tones will oft bring sudden bloom
Of hope secure, to him who lonely cries,
Wrestling with the young poet's agonies,
Neglect and scorn, which seem a certain doom :
Yes ! the few words which, like great thunder-drops,
Thy large heart down to earth shook doubtfully,
Thrilled by the inward lightning of its might,
Serene and pure, like gushing joy of light,
Shall track the eternal chords of Destiny,
After the moon-led pulse of ocean stops.

XVI.

THE POET.

POET ! thou art most wealthy, being poor ;
For are not thine the only earthly ears
Made rich with golden music of the spheres ?
Hast thou not snowy wings whereon to soar
Through the wide air of after and before,
And set thee high among thy crowned peers ?
Hath any man such joy as thy deep tears,
Or eyes like thine to pierce great nature's core ?
Thou hast the fairy coin, which, in wrong hands,
Is merely stones and leaves,—in thine, true gold ;
Thou art the very strength of all men's shields ;
By divine right, art monarch of all lands ;
And there is none but willing tribute yields,
Of worth too precious to be bought or sold.

XVII.

BELOVED, in the noisy city here,
The thought of thee can make all turmoil cease;
Around my spirit, folds thy spirit clear
Its still, soft arms, and circles it with peace;
There is no room for any doubt or fear
In souls so overfilled with love's increase,
There is no memory of the bygone year
But growth in heart's and spirit's perfect ease:
How hath our love, half nebulous at first,
Rounded itself into a full-orbed sun!
How have our lives and wills, (as haply erst
They were, ere this forgetfulness begun,)
Through all their earthly distantness outburst,
And melted, like two rays of light, in one!

XVIII.

FULL many noble friends my soul hath known,
Women and men, who in my memory
Have sown such beauty as can never die ;
And many times, when I seem all alone,
Within my heart I call up, one by one,
The joys I shared with them, the unlaced hours
Of laughing thoughts, that came and went like flowers,
Or higher argument, Apollo's own :
Those listening eyes that gave nobility
To humblest verses writ and read for love,
Those burning words of high democracy,
Those doubts that through the vague abyss would rove
And lean o'er chasms that took away the breath,—
When I forget them, may it be in death !

XIX.

How oft do I live o'er that blissful time
When first I found thy love within my breast,
Like the first violet in April's prime,
Born a full flower, more fair than all the rest,
And richer with the early dew of rhyme !
Till then, I felt my heart was but a guest
In the broad world, but now there is no clime
Where it as rightful sovereign may not rest :
Wherever Nature even a weed doth plant,
There it a fulness of delight may win ;
No dead or living thing will let it want,
None but whose heart will freely take it in ;
For Love hath made it now wise Nature's child,
And from her arms it cannot be exiled.

XX.

SLOW-OPENING flower of the summer morn,—
Blithe quietness of sun-delighted dew,—
Green inland oceans of unrippling corn,
Deep thoughtfulness of never-wrinkled blue,
Whose high, eternal silence seemeth born
For the lone moon and stars to wander through,—
Sunset,—and all the wreaths by Nature worn,
And momentarily thrown by for beauties new,—
My heart grows fragrant while on you I look,
And murmurs to itself, and feels at ease,
And trembles, like a sunny birch-tree shook
In rustling sparkles by a warm noon-breeze ;
Yet, when I see my Love, my heart runs o'er
With sympathies and strengths undreamed before.

XXI.

ON READING WORDSWORTH'S SONNETS IN DEFENCE OF
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.

As the broad ocean endlessly upheaveth,
With the majestic beating of his heart,
The mighty tides, whereof its rightful part
Each sea-wide bay and little weed receiveth,—
So, through his soul who earnestly believeth,
Life from the universal Heart doth flow,
Whereby some conquest of the eternal Woe,
By instinct of God's nature, he achieveth :
A fuller pulse of this all-powerful beauty
Into the poet's gulf-like heart doth tide,
And he more keenly feels the glorious duty
Of serving Truth, despised and crucified,—
Happy, unknowing sect or creed, to rest
And feel God flow for ever through his breast.

XXII.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

ONCE hardly in a cycle blossometh
A flower-like soul ripe with the seeds of song,
A spirit fore-ordained to cope with wrong,
Whose divine thoughts are natural as breath,
Who the old Darkness thickly scattereth
With starry words, that shoot prevailing light
Into the deeps, and wither, with the blight
Of serene Truth, the coward heart of Death :
Woe, if such spirit thwart its errand high,
And mock with lies the longing soul of man !
Yet one age longer must true Culture lie,
Soothing her bitter fetters as she can,
Until new messages of love outstart
At the next beating of the infinite Heart.

XXIII.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

THE love of all things springs from love of one ;
Wider the soul's horizon hourly grows,
And over it with fuller glory flows
The sky-like spirit of God ; a hope begun
In doubt and darkness 'neath a fairer sun
Cometh to fruitage, if it be of Truth ;
And to the law of meekness, faith, and ruth,
By inward sympathy, shall all be won : [feature
This thou shouldst know, who, from the painted
Of shifting Fashion, couldst thy brethren turn
Unto the love of ever-youthful Nature,
And of a beauty fadeless and eterne ;
And always 'tis the saddest sight to see
An old man faithless in Humanity.

XXIV.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

A POET cannot strive for despotism ;
His harp falls shattered ; for it still must be
The instinct of great spirits to be free,
And the sworn foes of cunning barbarism :
He, who has deepest searched the wide abysm
Of that life-giving Soul which men call fate,
Knows that to put more faith in lies and hate
Than truth and love is the true atheism :
Upward the soul for ever turns her eyes ;
The next hour always shames the hour before ;
One beauty, at its highest, prophesies
That by whose side it shall seem mean and poor ;
No God-like thing knows aught of less and less,
But widens to the boundless Perfectness.

XXV.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

THEREFORE think not the Past is wise alone,
For Yesterday knows nothing of the Best,
And thou shalt love it only as the nest
Whence glory-winged things to Heaven have flown :
To the great Soul alone are all things known ;
Present and future are to her as past,
While she in glorious madness doth forecast
That perfect bud, which seems a flower full-blown
To each new Prophet, and yet always opes
Fuller and fuller with each day and hour,
Heartening the soul with odour of fresh hopes,
And longings high, and gushings of wide power,
Yet never is or shall be fully blown
Save in the forethought of the Eternal One.

XXVI.

THE SAME, CONCLUDED.

FAR 'yond this narrow parapet of Time,
With eyes uplift, the poet's soul should look
Into the Endless Promise, nor should brook
One prying doubt to shake his faith sublime ;
To him the earth is ever in her prime
And dewiness of morning ; he can see
Good lying hid, for all eternity,
Within the teeming womb of sin and crime ;
His soul should not be cramped by any bar,
His nobleness should be so God-like high,
That his least deed is perfect as a star,
His common look majestic as the sky,
And all o'erflooded with a light from far,
Undimmed by clouds of weak mortality.

XXVII.

TO ———.

MARY, since first I knew thee, to this hour,
My love hath deepened, with my wiser sense
Of what in Woman is to reverence ;
Thy clear heart, fresh as e'er was forest-flower,
Still opens more to me its beauteous dower ;—
But let praise hush,—Love asks no evidence
To prove itself well-placed ; we know not whence
It gleans the straws that thatch its humble bower :
We can but say we found it in the heart,
Spring of all sweetest thoughts, arch-foe of blame,
Sower of flowers in the dusty mart,
Pure vestal of the poet's holy flame,—
This is enough, and we have done our part
If we but keep it spotless as it came.

XXVIII.

OUR love is not a fading, earthly flower ;
Its winged seed dropped down from Paradise,
And, nursed by day and night, by sun and shower,
Doth momentarily to fresher beauty rise :
To us the leafless autumn is not bare,
Nor winter's rattling boughs lack lusty green.
Our summer hearts make summer's fulness, where
No leaf, or bud, or blossom may be seen :
For nature's life in love's deep life doth lie,
Love,—whose forgetfulness is beauty's death,
Whose mystic key these cells of Thou and I
Into the infinite freedom openeth,
And makes the body's dark and narrow grate
The wide-flung leaves of Heaven's palace-gate.

XXIX.

THANKFULNESS.

THERE is no thankfulness more deep than this,—
To love and love with ever-glad increase,
To nestle in the heart with fluttering bliss
And think that now is the full tide of peace ;
Yet still to find, with each sun-circled hour,
A higher right to love, un hoped before,
A fuller insight, a serener power,
That widens down the soul's unfathomed core :
To feel that we are blest is thankfulness,
And thereby with exulting faith to know
That every human heart its kind must bless
With love, which, garnered up, rusts into woe,
But, freely given, always turns again,
And, for our flowers, brings us ripened grain.

1842.

XXX.

IN ABSENCE.

THESE rugged, wintry days I scarce could bear,
Did I not know, that, in the early spring,
When wild March winds upon their errands sing,
Thou wouldst return, bursting on this still air,
Like those same winds, when, startled from their lair,
They hunt up violets, and free swift brooks
From icy cares, even as thy clear looks
Bid my heart bloom, and sing, and break all care :
When drops with welcome rain the April day,
My flowers shall find their April in thine eyes,
Save there the rain in dreamy clouds doth stay,
As loath to fall out of those happy skies ;
Yet sure, my love, thou art most like to May,
That comes with steady sun when April dies.

XXXI.

WENDELL PHILLIPS.

He stood upon the world's broad threshold ; wide
The din of battle and of slaughter rose ;
He saw God stand upon the weaker side,
That sank in seeming loss before its foes ;
Many there were who made great haste and sold
Unto the cunning enemy their swords,
He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,
And, underneath their soft and flowery words,
Heard the cold serpent hiss ; therefore he went
And humbly joined him to the weaker part,
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So he could be the nearer to God's heart,
And feel its solemn pulses sending blood
Through all the wide-spread veins of endless good.

XXXII.

THE STREET.

THEY pass me by like shadows, crowds on crowds,
Dim ghosts of men, that hover to and fro,
Hugging their bodies round them, like thin shrouds
Wherein their souls were buried long ago :
They trampled on their youth, and faith, and love,
They cast their hope of human-kind away,
With Heaven's clear messages they madly strove,
And conquered,—and their spirits turned to clay :
Lo ! how they wander round the world, their grave,
Whose ever-gaping maw by such is fed,
Gibbering at living men, and idly rave,
“ We, only, truly live, but ye are dead.”
Alas ! poor fools, the anointed eye may trace
A dead soul's epitaph in every face !

XXXIII.

I GRIEVE not that ripe Knowledge takes away
The charm that Nature to my childhood wore,
For, with that insight, cometh, day by day,
A greater bliss than wonder was before ;
The real doth not clip the poet's wings,—
To win the secret of a weed's plain heart
Reveals some clue to spiritual things,
And stumbling guess becomes firm-footed art :
Flowers are not flowers unto the poet's eyes,
Their beauty thrills him by an inward sense ;
He knows that outward seemings are but lies,
Or, at the most, but earthly shadows, whence
The soul that looks within for truth may guess
The presence of some wondrous heavenliness.

XXXIV.

YE who behold the body of my thought,
Whose minds can surfeit on an outward grace,
Ye learn but half the lesson that is taught,
Looking no deeper down than Nature's face ;
Two meanings have our lightest fantasies,
One of the flesh, and of the spirit one,
And he who skips the latter only sees
The painter's colours and the sculptor's stone:
Unfathomably deep are all good things,
Each day therefrom the soul may drink its fill,
And straight a clearer truth to being springs,
The self-renewing fount o'errunneth still ;
For the unconscious poet can but write
What is foretold him by the Infinite.

XXXV.

O, HAPPY childhood ! dear, unthoughtful years
When life flowed onward like a rover wind,
Why did I leave your peace of heart behind
To plunge me in this sea of doubts and fears ?
Down, foolish sigh ! have not my manhood's tears
Washed off the scales that made my nature blind,
Letting Truth's growing light sure passage find
Into my soul, where now the sky half-clears ?
Thank God that I am numbered now with men,
That there are hearts that need my love and me,
That I have sorrows now to make me ken
My strength and weakness, and my right to be
Brother to those, the outcast and the poor,
Driven back to darkness from the world's proud door !

XXXVI.

ON MY TWENTY-FOURTH BIRTH-DAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1843.

Now have I quite passed by that cloudy If
That darkened the wild hope of boyish days,
When first I launched my slender-sided skiff
Upon the wide sea's dim, unsounded ways ;
Now doth Love's sun my soul with splendour fill,
And Hope hath struggled upward into Power,
Soft Wish is hardened into sinewy Will,
And Longing into Certainty doth tower :
The love of beauty knoweth no despair ;
My heart would break, if I should dare to doubt,
That from the Wrong, which makes its dragon's lair
Here on the Earth, fair Truth shall wander out,
Teaching mankind, that Freedom 's held in fee
Only by those who labour to set free.

XXXVII.

TO J. R. GIDDINGS.

GIDDINGS, far rougher names than thine have grown
Smoother than honey on the lips of men ;
And thou shalt aye be honourably known,
As one who bravely used his tongue and pen,
As best befits a freeman,—even for those,
To whom our Law's unblushing front denies
A right to plead against the life-long woes
Which are the Negro's glimpse of Freedom's skies :
Fear nothing and hope all things, as the Right
Alone may do securely ; every hour
The thrones of Ignorance and ancient Night
Lose somewhat of their long-usurped power,
And Freedom's lightest word can make them shiver
With a base dread that clings to them for ever.



L'ENVOI.

TO M. W.

WHETHER my heart hath wiser grown or not,
In these three years, since I to thee inscribed,
Mine own betrothed, the firstlings of my muse,—
Poor windfalls of unripe experience,
Young buds plucked hastily by childish hands
Not patient to await more full-blown flowers,—
At least it hath seen more of life and men,
And pondered more, and grown a shade more sad;
Yet with no loss of hope or settled trust
In the benignness of that Providence,
Which shapes from out our elements awry
The grace and order that we wonder at,
The mystic harmony of right and wrong,
Both working out His wisdom and our good :

A trust, Beloved, chiefly learned of thee,
Who hast that gift of patient tenderness,
The instinctive wisdom of a woman's heart,
Which, seeing Right, can yet forgive the Wrong,
And, strong itself to comfort and sustain,
Yet leans with full-confiding piety
On the great Spirit that encircles all.

Less of that feeling, which the world calls love,
Thou findest in my verse, but haply more
Of a more precious virtue, born of that,
The love of God, of Freedom, and of Man.
Thou knowest well what these three years have been,
How we have filled and graced each other's hearts,
And every day grown fuller of that bliss,
Which, even at first, seemed more than we could bear,
And thou, meantime, unchanged, except it be
That thy large heart is larger, and thine eyes
Of palest blue, more tender with the lore
Which taught me first how good it was to love ;
And, if thy blessed name occur less oft,
Yet thou canst see the shadow of thy soul

In all my song, and art well-pleased to feel
That I could ne'er be rightly true to thee,
If I were recreant to higher aims.
Thou didst not grant to me so rich a fief
As thy full love, on any harder tenure
Than that of rendering thee a single heart ;
And I do service for thy queenly gift
Then best, when I obey my soul, and tread
In reverence the path she beckons me.

'Twere joy enough,—if I could think that life
Were but a barren struggle after joy,—
To live, and love, and never look beyond
The fair horizon of thy bounteous heart,
Whose sunny circle stretches wide enough
For me to find a heaped contentment in ;
To do naught else but garner every hour
My golden harvest of sweet memories,
And count my boundless revenue of smiles
And happy looks, and words so kind and gentle
That each doth seem the first to give thy heart,—
Content to let my waveless soul flow on,

Reflecting but the spring-time on its brink,
And thy clear spirit bending like a sky
O'er it,—secure that from thy virgin hands
My brows should never lack their dearest wreath :
But life hath nobler destinies than this,
Which but to strive for is reward enough,
Which to attain is all earth gives of peace.
Thou art not of those niggard souls, who deem
That Poesy is but to jingle words,
To string sweet sorrows for apologies
To hide the barrenness of unfurnished hearts,
To prate about the surfaces of things,
And make more threadbare what was quite worn out:
Our common thoughts are deepest, and to give
Such beauteous tones to these, as needs must take
Men's hearts their captives to the end of time,
So that who hath not the choice gift of words
Takes these into his soul, as welcome friends,
To make sweet music of his joys and woes,
And be all Beauty's swift interpreters,
Links of bright gold 'twixt Nature and his heart,
This is the errand high of Poesy.

The day has long gone by wherein 'twas thought
That men were greater poets, inasmuch
As they were more unlike their fellow-men :
The poet sees beyond, but dwells among
The wearing turmoil of our work-day life ;
His heart not differs from another heart,
But rather in itself enfolds the whole
Felt by the hearts about him, high or low,
Hath deeper sympathies and clearer sight
And is more like a human heart than all ;
His larger portion is but harmony
Of heart, the all-potent alchemy that turns
The humblest things to golden inspiration ;
A loving eye's unmatched sovereignty ;
A self-sustained, enduring humbleness ;
A reverence for woman ; a deep faith
In gentleness, as strength's least doubtful proof ;
And an electric sympathy with love,
Heaven's first great message to all noble souls.

But, if the poet's duty be to tell
His fellow-men their beauty and their strength,

And show them the deep meaning of their souls,
He also is ordained to higher things ;
He must reflect his race's struggling heart,
And shape the crude conceptions of his age.
They tell us that our land was made for song,
With its huge rivers and sky-piercing peaks,
Its sea-like lakes and mighty cataracts,
Its forests vast and hoar, and prairies wide,
And mounds that tell of wondrous tribes extinct ;
But Poesy springs not from rocks and woods ;
Her womb and cradle are the human heart,
And she can find a nobler theme for song
In the most loathsome man that blasts the sight,
Than in the broad expanse of sea and shore
Between the frozen deserts of the poles.
All nations have their message from on high,
Each the messiah of some central thought,
For the fulfilment and delight of Man :
One has to teach that labour is divine ;
Another, Freedom ; and another, Mind ;
And all, that God is open-eyed and just,
The happy centre and calm heart of all.

Are, then, our words, our mountains, and our
Needful to teach our poets how to sing? [streams,
O, maiden rare, far other thoughts were ours,
When we have sat by ocean's foaming marge,
And watched the waves leap roaring on the rocks,
Than young Leander and his Hero had,
Gazing from Sestos to the other shore.
The moon looks down and ocean worships her,
Stars rise and set, and seasons come and go
Even as they did in Homer's elder time,
But we behold them not with Grecian eyes :
Then they were types of beauty and of strength.
But now of freedom, unconfined and pure,
Subject alone to Order's higher law.
What cares the Russian serf or Southern slave,
Though we should speak as man spake never yet
Of gleaming Hudson's broad magnificence,
Or green Niagara's never-ending roar?
Our country hath a gospel of her own
To preach and practise before all the world,—
The freedom and divinity of man,
The glorious claims of human brotherhood,—

Which to pay nobly, as a freeman should,
Gains the sole wealth that will not fly away,—
And the soul's fealty to none but God.
These are realities, which make the shows
Of outward Nature, be they ne'er so grand,
Seem small, and worthless, and contemptible :
These are the mountain-summits for our bards,
Which stretch far upward into heaven itself,
And give such wide-spread and exulting view
Of hope, and faith, and onward destiny,
That shrunk Parnassus to a mole-hill dwindles.
Our new Atlantis, like a morning-star,
Silvers the murk face of slow-yielding Night,
The herald of a fuller truth than yet
Hath gleamed upon the upraised face of Man
Since the earth glittered in her stainless prime,—
Of a more glorious sunrise than of old
Drew wondrous melodies from Memnon huge,
Yea, draws them still, though now he sits waist-deep
In the engulfing flood of whirling sand,
And looks across the wastes of endless gray,
Sole wreck, where once his hundred-gated Thebes

Pained with her mighty hum the calm, blue heaven :
Shall the dull stone pay grateful orisons,
And we till noon-day bar the splendour out,
Lest it reproach and chide our sluggard hearts,
Warm-nestled in the down of Prejudice,
And be content, though clad with angel-wings,
Close-clipped, to hop about from perch to perch,
In paltry cages of dead men's dead thoughts ?
O, rather, like the sky-lark, soar and sing,
And let our gushing songs befit the dawn
And sunrise, and the yet unshaken dew
Brimming the chalice of each full-blown hope,
Whose blithe front turns to greet the growing day !
Never had poets such high call before,
Never can poets hope for higher one,
And, if they be but faithful to their trust,
Earth will remember them with love and joy,
And, O, far better, God will not forget.
For he who settles Freedom's principles
Writes the death-warrant of all tyranny ;
Who speaks the truth stabs Falsehood to the heart,
And his mere word makes despots tremble more

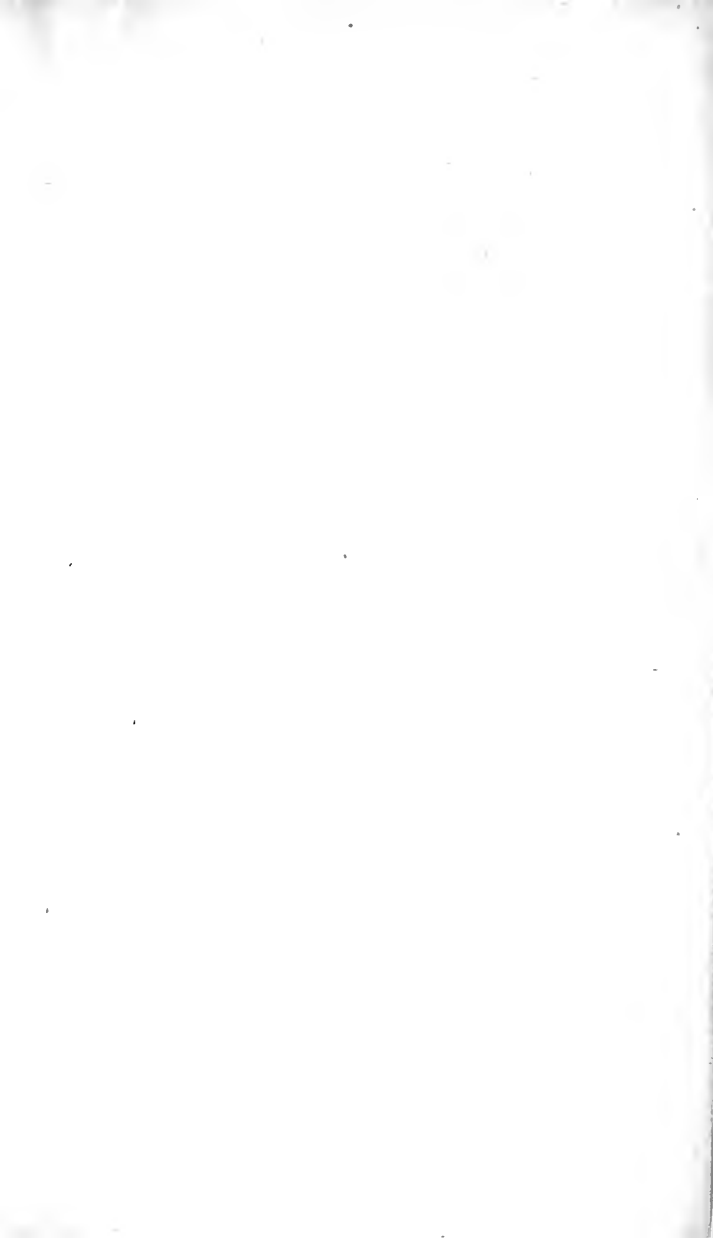
Than ever Brutus with his dagger could.
Wait for no hints from waterfalls or woods,
Nor dream that tales of red men, brute and fierce,
Repay the finding of this Western World,
Or needed half the globe to give them birth :
Spirit supreme of Freedom ! not for this
Did great Columbus tame his eagle soul
To jostle with the daws that perch in courts ;
Not for this, friendless, on an unknown sea,
Coping with mad waves and more mutinous spirits,
Battled he with the dreadful ache at heart
Which tempts, with devilish subtleties of doubt,
The hermit of that loneliest solitude,
The silent desert of a great New Thought ;
Though loud Niagara were to-day struck dumb,
Yet would this cataract of boiling life
Rush plunging on and on to endless deeps,
And utter thunder till the world shall cease,—
A thunder worthy of the poet's song,
And which alone can fill it with true life.
The high evangel to our country granted
Could make apostles, yea, with tongues of fire,

Of hearts half-darkened back again to clay !
'Tis the soul only that is national,
And he who pays true loyalty to that
Alone can claim the wreath of patriotism.

Beloved ! if I wander far and oft
From that which I believe, and feel, and know,
Thou wilt forgive, not with a sorrowing heart,
But with a strengthened hope of better things ;
Knowing that I, though often blind and false
To those I love, and, O, more false than all
Unto myself, have been most true to thee,
And that whoso in one thing hath been true
Can be as true in all. Therefore thy hope
May yet not prove unfruitful, and thy love
Meet, day by day, with less unworthy thanks,
Whether, as now, we journey hand in hand,
Or, parted in the body, yet are one
In spirit and the love of holy things.

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